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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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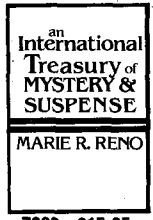

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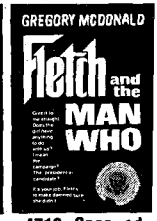

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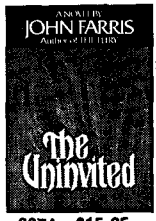

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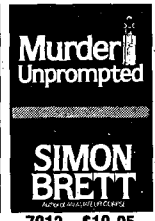

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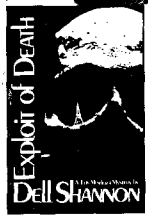

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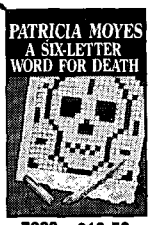

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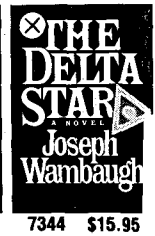

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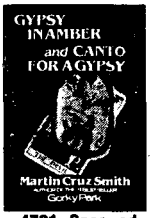

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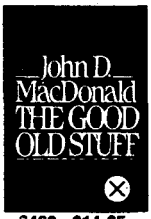

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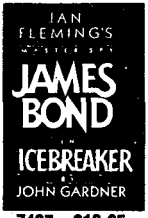

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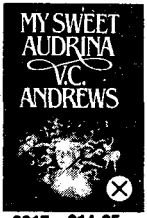

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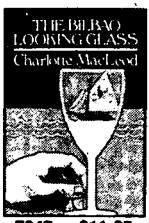

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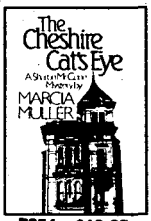

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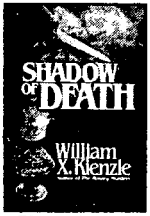

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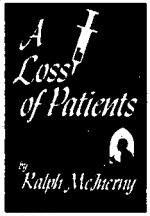

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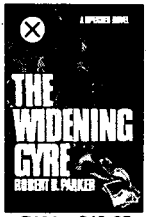

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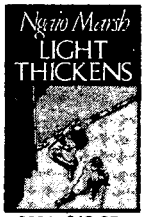

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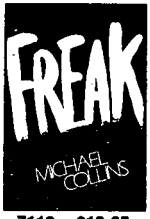

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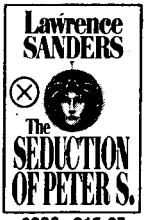

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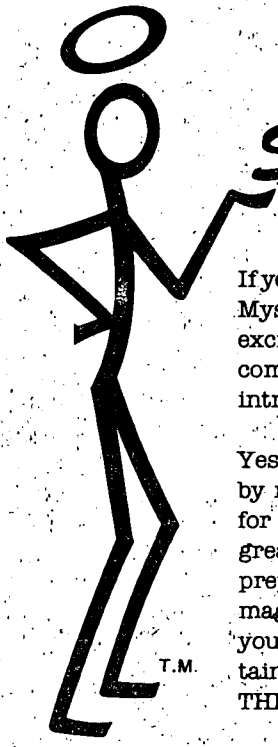

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a *NEW* short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

Even in early summer, the wind cut across Wimbledon Common and rattled the leaded windows in Luke Adams' Eighteenth Century cottage. The house was so big and so empty the night after Mariette went away that Luke had to go outside into the pine-scented darkness where he could see traffic passing on the Parkside to reassure himself he wasn't trapped on Wuthering Heights.

The churningly imaginative William Bankier is on a run and we predict an exceptional story by him in every issue of EQMM for months to come—some, like this one, seen through a glass darkly; others, like this one, seen through a kaleidoscope of many-colored glass . . .

THE COLLABORATORS

by WILLIAM BANKIER

"Have you been taking your medication?" Mariette asked and the question converted Luke Adams' righteous anger into outrage.

"Stick to the bloody point!" he yelled. He kicked the bedroom wastebasket against the wall and it spewed its load of her multi-colored tissues. "You're going off to Paris for two months leaving me alone in London!"

"You love London. I wish we'd never left Montreal." She turned on him the black brows and square jaw her ancestors had brought to Canada from Brittany centuries ago. On her the features were pretty and sexy much of the time, but not now. Now Adams was punishing objects to keep himself from having a shot at her.

"My job brought me to London," he reminded his wife. "Head of

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the U.K. office, a *promotion*. Lisa has made the adjustment—she's well in at the film studio. We're supposed to be a family!"

"In Montreal, I could breathe, I could think. My friends are all there. Listen, I'll tell you what it is. I'm French, okay? I want some time in Paris. Jacqueline and Jean-Claude will put me up."

"I have three presentations next week. Two here and one in Sheffield. Don't do this to me, Mariette."

She was putting the wastebasket explosion back together. "When is your next appointment with Dr. Farrow?"

"Dr. Farrow has no magic. We have to sort this out between ourselves."

"My ticket on the channel ferry is for tomorrow. Do you want me to tell Lisa?"

Adams told Lisa. She was his girl, compact with sandy hair cut short like his and the same perfect little three-quarter nose. Heads turned as they entered the restaurant and people smiled at this obvious father-daughter combination. He coated the pill for her, but she caught a faint taste of the truth.

"We decided Mama could do with some French ambience. She's beginning to wilt here among the anglos."

"But you'll be alone in the house, Dad. Are you going to be all right?"

"Not to worry. I've got so much going on at work these days I'll hardly be home anyway. Besides, it's only a temporary adjustment. The petite peasoup will soon miss her old porridge-eater and she'll come racing back to London." He was afraid to say how much he missed her. As a youth, Adams had been a good marathon swimmer, had come third in an all-day crawl across Lake Ontario. Now he was almost ready to swim the channel to be with his wife again.

"I could lock up my flat and come do for you." Lisa's suggestion scored high for good intentions.

"Never!" Her independent streak was as strong as his own. When she moved out last year, Adams missed her daily presence but he basked in the prestige of the phrase, "digs in Chelsea." It rolled proudly from his tongue whenever he spoke of his daughter. Her job at Arpy Productions was no great thing; she was a gopher—gopher coffee, gopher the mail. But she was learning film editing and one day she would climb. "How are things at work?" he asked her.

"Wait'll I tell you! They came in last week to shoot part of a commercial for Air Scotland—" Lisa's belly laugh, exactly like her

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father's in the days when Adams used to laugh, made everybody in the restaurant look up.

Back at the agency, Adams, whose relationship with the staff was matey, made a big thing out of his wife's departure. He would rather they heard it from him. His arrival two years ago as the new broom from the Canadian head office had filled them with dread. But they soon discovered he was an anglophile and that he led from the front. And that he was a former copywriter, which made him a human being. With their new boss working all the hours God sent, the writers and artists and account people began to drop their lazy ways and imitate this man who demonstrated the art of being professional and enjoying life, too. Now they told him poor thing, poor thing, when they learned he was to be a summer bachelor.

"You'll never go home now," said Gareth Lloyd, the creative director. "I hope you'll remember the rest of us still have families." The young Welshman had been worried lately by Adams' intensity. He knew the boss was on some kind of medication and that he attended therapy sessions at St. Antony's.

"Don't worry," Adams said, "all I'll expect from anybody is the usual hundred and ten percent." Then he broke down to this extent. "I'm worried about her going away. Mariette. She's more French than she is Canadian. These friends of hers may drag her into the Paris life and she'll never come back."

Gareth offered a suggestion. "How would you like to move in for a while with me and Bronwyn? We've got a spare room. Think of the satisfaction—you could talk shop day *and* night."

"It's good of you, Gareth—"

"And after a while you'll be so sick of leek soup your empty house will seem like heaven on earth."

The house was so big and so empty the night after Mariette went away that Adams almost wished he had accepted Gareth's invitation. Even in early summer, the wind cut across Wimbledon Common and rattled the leaded windows in his Eighteenth Century cottage. He had to go outside into the pine-scented darkness where he could see traffic passing on the Parkside to reassure himself he wasn't trapped on Wuthering Heights. Set back from the road on landscaped ground, the house was the envy of his colleagues because it was that little bit of England which few Englishmen can afford to own. Adams had arrived with a sizable stake realized when he sold his Montreal dwelling. When he saw the cottage advertised, he decided to have

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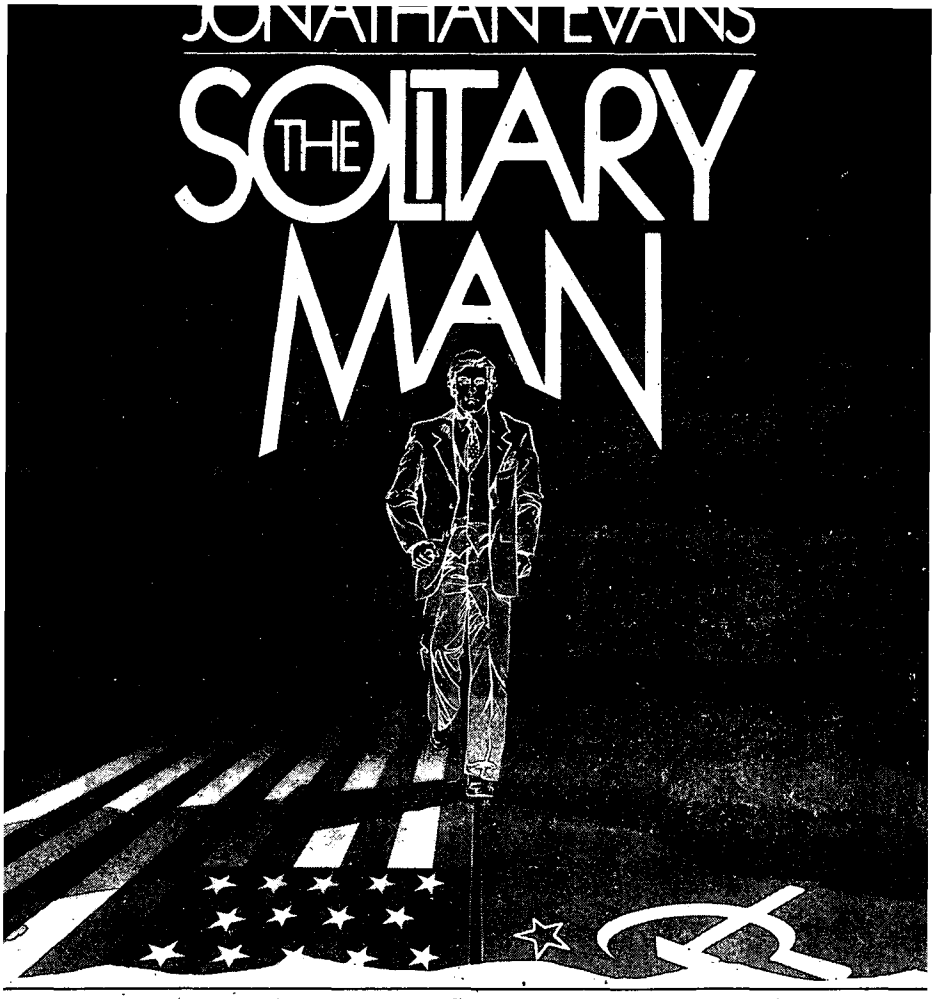

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it. Especially since so much of the mortgage interest could be deducted from taxable income.

But he was isolated up here on the edge of the village. So on his first night alone, he asked himself if he would have been better off buying a terraced house in Chelsea, where a street of shops with a pub at either end was never more than five minutes' walk from your front door.

Adams went inside and dialed Dr. Farrow's night number. The hospital operator took his name and said Dr. Farrow would ring him back as soon as possible. When the telephone rang, he felt immensely reassured.

"How are you, Luke?"

"I'd like to come and see you, Milt. Tomorrow if possible. I know my regular visit to check the medication isn't for a couple of weeks—"

"Tomorrow, tomorrow—" Farrow intoned as if he was about to deliver a soliloquy. "Yes, I can fit you in at three-thirty. Will you be all right this evening?"

"Yes, I'm fine. Just making the appointment eases the panic. See you tomorrow afternoon."

St. Antony's Hospital is located on an area of parkland in Wandsworth within sight and scent of a brewery. Its plant is a combination of Victorian buildings in burgundy brick and an escort of low, prefab structures put up after the war as a temporary measure to house the expanded services of the National Health. Decades later, with money scarce and socialism struggling against a swing to the right of the political pendulum, these huts have about them the shabby inevitability of the hospital of the future.

Adams drove in through the main gateway and turned sharp right to where Adult Psychiatry was located in a couple of the tall brick cottages. He parked and went inside, announced himself to the daft old soul who kept track of appointments, then went to a table in a corner and bought a plastic cup of watery coffee from the convalescent lady in charge of the silex and the biscuit tin.

As he sat on a damaged chair and sipped his hot brown water, Adams watched the comings and goings of maintenance staff and a few people in suits who might have been doctors. They all looked half out of it, as if they were patients whose treatment included being given a few simple duties. This evidence of the inmates running the asylum had troubled him at first, but now, after more than a year's attendance at Dr. Farrow's clinic, Adams accepted the ec-

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centric establishment because it worked. Perhaps it was England itself in microcosm, this collection of limping misfits making do in a clapped-out building as if there could be nothing any better in the world.

Milton Farrow appeared in his doorway and smiled. He stood aside as Adams went through, and the Canadian experienced, as always, the sheer physical presence of the giant doctor. Six and a half feet tall, heavy, slope-shouldered, barrel-chested, Farrow always presented an apologetic smile as if to say: "Forgive me, I never intended to grow this big."

He sat at his desk and shifted a few papers. Adams occupied the wooden chair beside the desk. Against the opposite wall of the tiny office, a hospital cot with made-up sheets and blanket and a pillow came as close as a state institution could manage to the leather couch of Dr. Freud.

"Well," Farrow said, turning to his patient, and Adams said: "Well," and they both smiled because they always began their session with this breezy, down-to-business echo.

"I have the results of your last blood sample," Farrow said, running a blunt finger down a page. "Your lithium level is still well within the limit. Are you feeling okay?"

"Fine. I'm not clinically depressed." Years ago, Adams had been diagnosed as manic-depressive, and to control the condition, to level out his highs and lows, he had been given tablets of lithium carbonate to take. Nobody really understands why lithium can help a lot of manic-depressive people remain on a more even keel, but it does.

"The thing is, at the moment," he went on, "my wife has gone away to Paris. For the summer. She has friends there—I told you she's French-Canadian, she can't really talk to people here. So—" Adams let it come out as simply as he could. "I'm all alone and I don't like it."

"Mmmm." The doctor sat like a man waiting to see if the tap will extrude another drop of water.

"My daughter has said she'll come and stay with me but I know she doesn't really want to move back home. She's got her own flat and a nice life going."

"Yes."

"And this good bloke I work with, Gareth. He's invited me to stay with him and his wife. But that wouldn't be right." Adams looked through his hands at the floor, feeling Farrow's presence. "So last

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night, alone in the house, suddenly I felt this panic. That's when I rang you."

"You seem calm now."

"Don't let it fool you."

"Yes?"

Ideas were bubbling up in Adams the way they often did in the presence of the doctor. "I thought of myself the other day," he said, "as a Mediterranean person inside. On the outside I'm this calm, civilized Luke Adams. But maybe I should rage a lot more, wave my arms at people, even let myself weep."

"Why don't you?"

"Because you guys would put me away if I did."

The session went on easily for the usual half hour, which was all the clinic could allow per patient. Adams and Farrow never had a problem talking to each other. As always, the doctor found an opportunity to introduce the subject of the book he was writing. Adams had been able to suggest some useful alterations in the Farrow volume of case histories. Today, he offered another tip and the doctor made a note on the manuscript.

"You're nobody in the medical establishment here unless you're published," he said. Farrow was an American, recently graduated from a university in Florida. In an early chat with Adams, he had admitted the reason for his moving to England was an awareness that he was not up to competing in America—his qualifications were not good enough. But here in England, where everything was low key, where the treatment of mental illness was still seen by many as a matter of the patient pulling himself together and soldiering on, Farrow felt he would fit in. When Adams first showed up at the clinic, referred by his general practitioner, Dr. Sharma, to have his lithium level checked, he was passed along to Farrow because it was felt the two North Americans might make a match.

"I have a suggestion to offer," the doctor said as the session ended. "You're my last patient today. If you can put up with me, why don't I invite myself to your place for dinner? I can bring my manuscript and pick your brains a little more. We can watch the final episode of *I, Claudius* on BBC2." Farrow's face produced an engaging smile. "Before I was psychoanalyzed, I could never have invited myself like that."

Adams laughed. "It's a great idea. Can you leave now?"

"Let me have five minutes to make a couple of telephone calls. I'll meet you in the waiting room . . ."

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They drove to the Wimbledon cottage in convoy, Adams proceeding slowly and keeping Farrow's rusty MG sportscar visible in the rear-view mirror. The stylish, battered little vehicle enclosed the giant medical man like a capsule.

When both cars pulled into the gravel lane beside the cottage, Farrow climbed out, inspected the trees and shrubs and the handsome building, and said: "Advertising is the career to choose."

"The rewards are there," Adams admitted. "But you're always having to persuade people that a campaign is superlative when your true belief is that it is no better than fairly good. It can rot your soul."

Preparing supper turned out to be fun. Milton Farrow emerged as an enthusiastic amateur chef. While Adams poured drinks, the doctor went into the kitchen and rattled the pots and pans. Busy with chopping-board and skillet, he produced a massive spanish omelette, which he cut in half and served on warmed plates along with steamed brussels sprouts in a mustard-and-lemon sauce and a bowl of salad in which the ingredients, cut in large chunks, glistened in a tangy garlic dressing.

"Crudités," he said as he doled it out, "straight from the French quarter of Fort Lauderdale."

Adams enjoyed the meal and the convivial evening that followed, during which the absence of Mariette never entered his mind. When the prestige television drama ended and they finished their brandy, he yawned without embarrassment and said: "Me for bed. Big meeting tomorrow."

"How are you feeling?"

"Better than I thought possible this afternoon."

Farrow did not celebrate. "You'll feel a reaction tomorrow. Your anxieties over the absence of your wife have only been suppressed."

"Well. This has been a useful visit anyway, Milt, and I thank you for coming."

Farrow glanced at his watch and winced. "Long drive back to my place after all the booze."

"Listen, I'm silly, forgive me. Stay here, use the spare bedroom."

"Will it be a lot of trouble?"

"None at all. I should have suggested it earlier."

When Adams came into the spare room carrying fresh towels, Farrow was stretched out on the bed with his ankles crossed, his shoes carefully extended clear of the spread. "I always think of my brother Dave," he said. "Did I ever tell you about him?"

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"Not that I recall." It seemed inhospitable to stand over his guest. Adams drew a chair close and sat near the head of the bed.

"We had four sisters, so Dave and I always had to share a room. We were close. He wasn't overgrown like I am, he was normal size. All through school, Dave got top marks while I had trouble getting through. They made me play football, not because I'm an athlete but because it took two guys from the other team to move me. The girls loved Dave; he could choose anybody he wanted." Farrow fell silent for a few moments. Then: "I remember—"

Adams waited, then heard himself prompting in the same neutral tone used by the doctor during their sessions. "Yes?"

"One Saturday, my parents took all the girls in the car on a shopping trip for clothes. There was a place about a hundred miles away where my father knew the owner and could get a discount. So the house was empty all day because I had football practice and Dave—I wasn't sure what Dave was doing.

"When I came home I didn't expect to find anybody there, so I threw down my gear and went upstairs. I was tired, I was going to flake out on my bed. But when I went in our room, there was Dave with this girl. It was quite a scene. I froze. I just stood there, staring at them. It was a hot afternoon and they didn't have any covers over them. After what seemed a hell of a long time, Dave said: "What are you going to do, Milt? Are you getting in with us, or what?" I ran out of there and as I went down the stairs I heard the two of them laughing."

In the silence that followed, Adams noticed the way Farrow's fingers gripped the bedspread as though he anticipated a sharp movement that would fling him into space.

"Hell, it was my bedroom, too," Farrow concluded.

Adams knew he wasn't required to comment on this event. He said, in an attempt to bring his guest back from the past: "Where is your brother now?"

"He's an important man in computers." Farrow sat up and wiped both hands over his face. "Out west, in silicone valley."

"And you're an important psychiatrist in London, England."

"Not very."

"Important to me."

Now the big face shone with boyish gratitude. "Thanks for that, Luke."

In the morning, Adams quietly organized himself through break-

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fast and getting dressed. Before leaving, he tapped on the guest-room door. "Do you need a call this morning, Milt?"

"No patients this morning," the muffled voice responded.

"Lucky for some. I'm off."

It was one of those days during which Adams had, literally, no time to look at the clock. He was astonished to find himself at six-thirty driving back across Putney Bridge, along the crowded high street, then up the long hill to the Parkside and home. As he drove in between the chestnut and the elm, he was surprised to discover Milton Farrow's car still in the yard, though parked differently than it had been that morning.

Inside, the house smelled deliciously of home cooking. Farrow emerged from the kitchen carrying a gin and tonic. He took Adams' briefcase from his hand and gave him the glass. "How was your day? I went out and did some shopping. You are about to taste Mother Farrow's Oven Beef Casserole—stew with a crust on top. Drink that, I'm ahead of you."

Adams experienced a mixture of annoyance, embarrassment, and amusement. "You didn't have to stay and make me supper."

"I wanted to. Look. Give a glance in here." He led Adams into the library and indicated papers spread on the desk. "My manuscript, sorely in need of a collaborator. I thought after supper we could spend an hour getting chapter five in shape. After which there is pro basketball on Channel 4. Crystal Palace versus Sunderland."

Adams sipped his drink and wandered into the kitchen. The pie smelled heavenly and it came out of the oven ready for the photographer. Luke was surrounded with tender loving care substantially above the level he received when Mariette was at home. But, damn it, none of this was his idea. It was being done to him.

The delayed reaction had been learned during a long course of therapy back home. Adams swallowed his urge to respond with irritation and decided to wait until after dinner. The meal went well—Farrow had purchased a fat bottle of wine on his shopping trip—but as coffee was served, Adams still felt put upon.

"Milt," he said, "that was delicious. But you didn't have to."

"I wanted to."

"I mean I'm okay now. I've absorbed the impact of Mariette's departure."

"Let me be the judge of that." Farrow finished his coffee. "Shall we have a go at the manuscript?"

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"No. I'm sorry to be blunt, but you give me no choice. I've been working all day. I don't want to take on your book."

"Never mind. We can set it aside till tomorrow."

There was silence in the room while Adams absorbed the implications of what had just been said. "I can't work on it tomorrow, either. And what about your patients?"

"I have a month's leave of absence pending. I rang in today and said I was taking the time to work on my book. They don't expect me at the clinic till this time in August."

Adams began to understand the scope of his problem. He chose his words carefully. "Milt, I don't know if I said something to give you the wrong impression—either about the help I need or about my willingness to help you. Either way, let's get it straight. I'm okay. I was upset about my wife leaving for the summer but it's not the end of the world—I can cope by myself. So you go on home and work on your book. I'll be available for telephone consultations if you run into a bad patch. And next month I'll come and see you, as always, to check on my lithium level."

Adams got up and carried his dishes to the sink. When he turned, Farrow was watching him with a triumphant expression on his face.

"It's worse than I thought," he said.

"What is?"

"Believe me, Luke, you don't see yourself. As a doctor, I recognize in you a man close to the end of his tether. You've been working too hard for months. We both know that. Now, without much notice, your wife abandons you. When you came to see me the other day, you were about to disappear over the edge. Even now, I'm not sure I can drag you back."

Adams had to laugh. "You must be talking about some other patient. Milt, listen to yourself—this is preposterous. I'm beginning to think *you're* the one who needs treatment."

"As I feared," the doctor murmured, shaking his head.

"In any case, I refuse to go along with this any longer. I don't like to be impolite, but you force me to be. Finish up, please, and then leave."

Farrow stood up, towering over Adams in the kitchen which had gone dark as the sun went down. He snapped on the light over the sink. "You go and relax," he said in a subdued tone of voice. "I'll wash up these dishes, then I'll bring us both another coffee."

"And then you'll go, Milt. I have to get back to normal."

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"Normal?" The doctor squirted liquid detergent into a stream of hot water running into the sink. "Where the hell is that?"

Adams sat by the front window where he could see both cars parked on the gravel yard. He switched on a lamp and spread the evening paper across his knees but he couldn't concentrate on the news. A plan occurred to him—he would arrange time off work, pleading fatigue, then hop a plane to Paris and join Mariette. Tell her the truth—that he was lost without her and that anything might be possible, not excluding a voluntary posting back to the Montreal office where it all began. Those had been good years, both of them young and full of enthusiasm, feasts at fine restaurants, roaring with the hockey crowd in the Forum, vivid colors, bodies against the boards, the frantic organ urging them on—*"Les Canadiens sont la!"*

Farrow brought in two steaming mugs. "I put in the last of the brandy," he said. "Drink up and then I'll go."

Adams sipped—it tasted good. "No hard feelings, Milt."

"If you don't need me, what's the point?"

"I need your services as before, but not here day after day."

"I understand. I promise to be around when you need me."

They finished their coffee and Farrow got up to go. He stood over Adams. "Are you all right? Your eyes look heavy."

"I'm fine." Adams stood up and fell sideways, catching himself with a hand on the doctor's arm. "Hey, my legs are numb."

"It's a reaction. I was afraid of this."

"My head is floating—"

"You're a sicker man than you've been willing to admit. Let's get you to bed."

Tucked in and with Farrow looming over him, Adams said: "I don't believe this. Why should it hit me all of a sudden?"

"You've been repressing a lot of anxiety, pretending it was business as usual. Don't worry, I'll stay and we'll see how you are in the morning."

Adams slept with no awareness of the passage of time. When he opened his eyes, the room was bright. Farrow moved into his line of vision. "How do you feel?"

"As if I've been drinking lead." He got up to go to the bathroom and the doctor had to help him through the doorway. He seemed to be wrapped in thick material. When he was back in bed, Farrow presented him with two pills and a glass of water.

"What are they?"

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"Good for what ails you. Do as the doctor says."

He swallowed the pills and sank back onto the pillow. Then his swampy mind heaved and something solid floated to the surface. "Work," he said. "I've got meetings—"

"I telephoned at half past nine. They send their love and you're not to worry, somebody named Gareth is covering for you."

"I want Lisa to know. My daughter. Ask her to come and see me tonight. Her number is in the little book by the phone."

"I'll take care of it. You rest."

Adams did not exactly sleep, he fell unconscious. When he surfaced again, the room was dark. He reached for the bedside lamp and knocked it off the table. The overhead light came on and Farrow was bending over, helping him. "What the hell is happening to me?"

"Don't be frightened. It's a breakdown. I've seen it coming for a long time."

"I was going along fine."

"You'd be the last one to know. Your wife spotted it and she didn't want to be here when it happened. She got away. But I'm here to help as long as you need me, Luke. You'll get past this crisis and then we'll take our time easing you back."

Farrow went away and came back with a tray. "Time you ate something."

"No sale."

"Drink the juice, anyway. Doctor's orders."

He sipped and set the acid down. "I'll take it after."

"Lisa looked in. She brings you love." He produced a paperback book. "She thought you might like to read this." He set the book on the bedside table. "I'm working on my manuscript. Boy, am I in need of a healthy Luke Adams to assist me. Back soon."

Adams lay gazing at the ceiling. He managed to turn his head and focus on Lisa's gift. The book looked familiar. He remembered the title from the newsstand in his office building. He had bought it and read a third of the way in before losing interest. He managed to pick it up now and turn the pages. There was the dog-ear at page ninety. Lisa had not brought him this book. This was a book he had bought himself. He lay breathing deeply, rising out of his semi-coma, putting it all together.

If Lisa had not been to see him—and he was certain now that she had not been in the house—why was Milt Farrow pretending she had been? He had not telephoned her, clearly, or Lisa would have

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arrived in a taxi and would have sat by his bed until he woke up, however many days it took.

Things were not as they seemed. Farrow had not called Lisa because Adams was not sick. But he *felt* sick—he felt shattered. Why? The answer was so obvious, he began to grin. He was drugged! The farewell coffee and brandy the other night. Next day, the pills. Right. Adams would avoid all food and drink from now on. No more juice for a start.

He managed to pull his legs up, turn, and put his feet on the carpet. Still shaky, but better. The early dose must have been a real Mickey Finn. Now, if he rested for a moment, Adams felt he could walk. Why was Farrow doing this? The man had tried to move in with his terrible book project when he learned his patient's wife had gone away. Perhaps he just needed companionship, he was lonely. No, it was worse than that. He was not behaving in a rational way.

So? Whoever said psychiatrists were immune from emotional disorders? Adams had read somewhere that the suicide rate was high among members of the medical profession.

He got up and held his balance. He went to the door and turned the handle. It turned, but the door did not move. Something was different. He peered through the crack and saw a dark shaft. Farrow had mounted a bolt on the other side! He was locked in, a prisoner in his own bedroom!

He could hear classical music playing on the kitchen radio down the hall. Dishes clashed in a sinkful of water, a deceptively domestic sound. Adams went back to the bed and sat down. The locked door could be a blessing in disguise; it forced him to think before acting. Farrow was twice his size. To confront him and accuse him of this crazy kidnaping might be to invite a broken jaw, or worse.

Adams needed help. Professional help. To bring in the police was not the answer. For one thing, Farrow would probably dazzle them with technical language. Besides, Adams wasn't interested in getting the doctor in trouble with the law. The poor man was pathetic. No, somebody had to come who could understand a quiet explanation, who could sense in Farrow the workings of a troubled mind.

Dr. Sharma. As his general practitioner, she had set Adams up with the referral that led to his relationship with Farrow. Call Dr. Sharma, have her come around and observe them both.

Adams began to get dressed. It turned out to be a laborious process. He settled for shoes without socks, jacket over pajama top. He pocketed his booklet of personal telephone numbers and went to the

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window, raising it quietly. The drop to the ground was no more than five feet. He landed in soil he had turned himself only a week ago when one of his greatest problems had been weeds among the marigolds.

There was a telephone booth on a corner three blocks away. His watch had stopped. He estimated the time to be near midnight, judging by the infrequency of the traffic. The call box was in sight. He wouldn't call Dr. Sharma directly. It was difficult at the best of times to speak to a particular physician. And in this case, it had to be Sharma. He would ring Gareth Lloyd and explain the problem to him. Gareth would understand, and then, however long it took, efficient Gareth would get through to Sharma and persuade her to come to the house and rescue him.

It worked well. Gareth was watching a late film, only a little drunk. For a minute or so, he insisted on believing that his colleague was sending him up. When the truth got through, he settled down and played back exactly what he was to do and say.

"Hold on, old sod," he concluded. "We'll soon have this straightened out. Sure you don't want me to whiz around and beat this man to a pulp?"

"Just get me Dr. Sharma."

Adams was leaving the booth when a police car pulled up, blue light flashing. Two young officers climbed out and approached him warily, keeping their distance, one on either side. "Evening, sir. You all right?"

"I'm just going home."

They noticed his bare feet inside his shoes, the striped pajama collar at his neck. "Climb in, sir. We'll run you there."

"It's all right, I prefer to walk."

"No trouble, sir. Mr. Adams, is it?"

In the end, he got into the car. Farrow was waiting at the side door as they rolled onto the gravel square. Adams' mind had been working, he knew what not to do. A wild scene in front of the police with him accusing the doctor of holding him prisoner would play into Farrow's hand. He need only shrug his big shoulders and raise his eyebrows and Adams might end up in a straitjacket.

So he went in without a word, proceeded to his room, undressed down to his pajamas, and got into bed. After all, help was on the way later tonight or in the morning. Dr. Sharma was on the way.

Farrow stood over him. "Silly thing to do. You're establishing a colorful case history for yourself."

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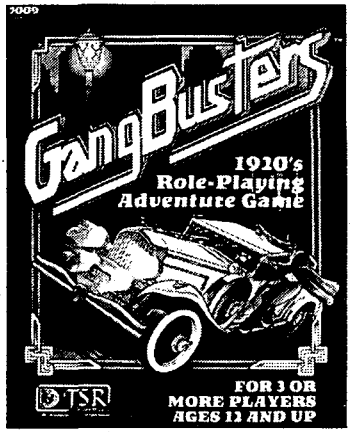

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"I wanted to ring Lisa. She wasn't home." Let him find out about Sharma when she arrived at the door.

"There doesn't have to be war between us, Luke."

"Why put a lock on my door?"

"For your own protection, and mine. Don't you remember what you did the other night? I found you in the kitchen at three o'clock—you were getting out knives."

"I don't believe that." But he went to sleep wondering if it could be true. He felt now as if he needed some kind of weapon in this unfair fight against Milton Farrow.

Adams slept late again and was awakened by the sound of voices in the hall. They murmured on for some time as he sat up, rubbed his face awake, combed his hair with his fingers, and propped a couple of pillows behind his back.

The door opened and they came into the room together, Farrow leading the way, Dr. Sharma following, her waist-length braid of coarse black hair swaying, her dusky face solemn behind neat gold spectacles.

"Here's our patient," Farrow said. "How are we this morning?"

"Let's take a vote," Adams said, then regretted his flippancy. "I feel fine."

"I didn't realize you'd made contact with Dr. Sharma through your friend last night. But a check-up is a good idea."

"Can I talk to you alone, Dr. Sharma?" Adams said.

As she drew up a chair and set her bag on the floor, Farrow was moving out of the room. "I was just leaving," he said. "Give a shout if you need any help," he added as he closed the door.

"So," Dr. Sharma said. The owl eyes observed him compassionately. He had always liked visiting Shipra Sharma. He was a healthy man, his visits had always to do with minor problems, and whenever they talked at her desk in the surgery Adams always felt as if he was moments away from asking her out for a drink. Now he watched as she unpacked the narrow metal box, wrapped the rubber bag around his arm, pumped it up, and read his blood pressure.

"It isn't me," he said, "it's Dr. Farrow. I think he's gone around the bend."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he's got me here and he won't let me out. He's giving me drugs to sedate me."

"Did the police collect you in your pajamas last night?"

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"I had to go out the window to use the phone. He's put a lock on my door."

"He showed me the lock. He says you don't remember taking out the knives."

"That's all lies!" Adams heard the outrage in his voice, but he couldn't control it. "I didn't go *into* the kitchen! I can't even walk!"

"You walked to the phone booth."

"That was last night. I've stopped eating and drinking so he can't give me any more drugs." Adams searched the calm, dark eyes. "Christ, you're supposed to help me!"

She repacked the blood-pressure apparatus. "I understand your wife has gone away."

"For the summer, that's all. She's visiting friends in Paris."

"How do you feel about that?"

"I wish she was here. But it isn't a catastrophe—I can cope. I have my work."

"I believe you work very hard."

"You're saying what he says. You've swallowed everything he's told you."

She got to her feet. "I don't think there is anything physically wrong with you. You need lots of rest. Can you let things go and stay in bed for a week?"

"He's moved in, damn it! He invited himself here and he tried to stay and when I eased him out he gave me a knock-out drug and made up this story about how I'm sick and need his supervision! He wants me to help him with his goddamn book! I'm his prisoner, Dr. Sharma, can't you see that?"

"Why would he do that to you?" she asked quietly.

Adams brought out the only answer he could think of. *"Because he's lonely!"* he shouted so loudly that Farrow thudded down the corridor and opened the door.

Dr. Sharma left the room with him and through the closed door he heard their murmuring conversation again. After the front door closed, Farrow returned to the bedroom. "I could have told you she would side with me. You don't know much about the medical profession."

Adams forced himself to be calm. This lunatic was in charge and nothing was to be gained by calling him mad. "Why are you doing this to me, Milt?"

He sat down. "Because when you told me your wife had gone to France, I saw my summer working out in a certain way."

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"Staying here."

"Why not? I didn't realize my presence would be anathema to you. I'm a good cook. I can feed you better than she ever did. I have plenty of leave, I could use the time off. And you could help me with my book. I'm sorry I ever started the damn thing—I can't finish it myself."

"But you're forcing yourself on me! I have my own life!"

"I know." Farrow stared at the floor and his face was so sad it was ugly. "I've always been the unwanted party." He got up and slammed out of the room.

Ten minutes later, he was back. "I've gone too far to stop now," he said. "You'll have to cooperate with me. No drugs, I promise—nothing in your food or drink. As for you, don't try to get away or call anybody else. The police have a report on you and Dr. Sharma has seen you. Any more erratic behavior and I can certify you. All right?"

"You're the one who's crazy. Do you understand that?"

"I'll cut down my time. Two weeks only, a fortnight. That should allow us to get the book in shape. Then I'll go back to the clinic and you can go back to work."

The telephone rang. Farrow went to answer it. He came back carrying the extension phone, which he plugged in beside the bed. "It's your daughter." He lifted the receiver and handed it to Adams.

"Lisa, hi!"

"What's up with you? I called the office and they said you aren't well."

Adams realized how cleverly Farrow was behaving in letting him speak to his daughter. If he tried to tell her the truth, he would upset her. If he began raging against his imprisonment, he would end up having to contend with the police and Dr. Sharma. So here he was, playing Farrow's game while the doctor looked on, smiling. "It's nothing serious, love. A slight case of overwork. I'm fortunate in having Milt Farrow staying here with me."

"The shrink? How do you rate him?"

"He has some leave of absence coming, so he's going to bunk in here for the next fortnight. I'll repay him by helping him with a book of case histories he's writing.

"It's called, *Where the Bodies Are Buried,*" he concluded and all three of them ended up laughing.

For a week, the routine was developed. Adams let his colleagues

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at the office know that he needed a fortnight's rest. They seemed pleased that he was going to look after himself. He decided this, too, would pass and settled in to make the best of it. The food was excellent. Work on Farrow's book was no duller than most of what he did for a living. They even began to relax and have a laugh or two as in the old sessions at the clinic.

By the beginning of the second week, the situation was so calm that Adams sensed he could probably walk out of there, go back to work, and let Farrow do his worst. But if the man was vindictive enough, it could mean policemen in the office. For the sake of a few more days, he decided not to make waves.

On Thursday evening, as they were having a nightcap, the doctor said: "I propose a holiday weekend. A final reward for all the hard work we've both been doing."

Into Adams' mind floated a view of Paris and himself at a candlelit table with Mariette. "The good places are crowded right now," he said.

"Not where I have in mind. A friend of mine owns an island off the south coast. He and his family are in Greece this summer. He gave me a key and told me to go over any time I want to."

"I'm not sure—"

"Don't be so negative, Luke. Dr. Farrow prescribes."

It might be a nice ending to a painful experience. "All right," he said. "But leave your manuscript here."

"Agreed." Farrow shook his patient by the hand. "No work for three whole days."

In the morning they took a taxi to Victoria Station and boarded a train for the coast. A bus carried them to the coastal village from where Adams could see the island lying a couple of miles offshore. Farrow had telephoned ahead to lay on a man with a powerboat. Adams stood by the boat while his companion entered a shop to buy supplies. He was surprised when Farrow showed up with two assistants laden with boxes. "I thought this was a weekend," he said.

"I've been coming and going for the past month and a half," the doctor explained. "I owe it to my friend to replenish his stocks."

The trip across into choppy water was not pleasant. They were soaked with spray. Even though all three of them in the boat had put on life-jackets, Adams noticed that Farrow was gripping the seat and his knuckles were white. When they entered calmer water near the island, he said: "I'm glad that's over."

"Don't you swim?"

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"Two lengths of the Y pool."

Adams said nothing. He looked back at the mainland and judged his marathon swims as a young man to have been much farther. Here, of course, there might be tides and currents—

The weekend passed quickly. Adams enjoyed the sea air, Farrow's well cooked meals, the breezy hours on the shingle soaking up the sun. Late on Sunday afternoon, he asked: "When does the boat come back for us?"

Farrow had surrounded himself with a low rampart built of stones gathered from the beach. He was putting up flags made from matchsticks and cigarette papers. He said: "I told the man next week."

"You told me three days! Don't play around, Milt, I'm due back at work tomorrow!"

"Relax. Isn't this a nice place?"

"Are you telling me we're trapped here? What if somebody has a heart attack?"

"There's a skiff in the boathouse." He glanced up. "It's locked and the key is put away."

Adams got to his feet. "You're crazy, Farrow! And when I get back, I'm going to make it known! What are we supposed to do here for a week?"

"I brought the manuscript. I thought we might press on with chapter twelve."

"Not me!" Adams kicked Farrow's construction, scattering stones along the beach. "If I find your bloody manuscript, I'll set fire to it!" He strode away toward the house.

"And you say I'm crazy!" the doctor called after him in a jubilant tone of voice.

From the front-room window, Adams could see the wind had dropped at the end of the afternoon. The water between the island and the mainland was calm. Although he hadn't done any marathon swimming in years, he had kept himself in shape and he felt certain the distance was within his capabilities.

Quickly, Adams stripped down to his shorts and left the house at a trot. Once past Farrow and into the water, he would be safe. The doctor was no swimmer—he had said so and Adams believed him.

It worked. Farrow looked up from his stone repairs as Adams splashed into the shallows. "What are you doing?"

"Going home."

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"You're crazy! It's farther than it looks!"

Farrow moved to the water's edge and watched his prisoner striking away into deep water. "Okay!" he called. "You win! Come back—we'll row home tonight in the skiff!"

"I believe you," Adams said, and he kept on swimming.

Farrow's next cry planted the idea in Adams' mind. "If you get in trouble," the doctor called, "I won't be able to help you!"

Almost without thinking, Adams took a few more strokes, then he turned onto his back and began to thrash the water. "Help!"

"What's wrong?"

"Cramp! Oh, God—help!"

"Swim back!" Farrow, fully dressed, blundered into the water up to his knees.

"I can't make it! Help me, Milt—help!"

The doctor plunged forward and began to swim, producing a ponderous overhead stroke, all wasted energy and very little progress. Treading water, Adams watched his approach. As he came close, Adams moved himself away, staying just beyond Farrow's reach.

"I'm too—too far out." Farrow turned his head, saw the beach in the distance, looked back at Adams, his fact split with panic. "Help me, Luke—"

Adams said nothing. He had stopped struggling. He paddled himself easily away, maintaining the distance between them. Farrow began lashing the water. His head went under and he came up choking, spitting out. "Luke—I'm drowning—"

Adams moved away again. Their eyes met and at last Farrow understood what had happened, what was going to happen. There was one calm moment when he stopped fighting. "Was it—that bad?" he asked.

Adams turned and began to develop his most powerful free-style. He felt driven to get away. He counted to one hundred strokes and when he looked back, the sea behind him was calm.

Mariette came back from Paris a couple of weeks early, bored with her friends and ready to give London a chance. Lisa became engaged to the film editor at the studio. The agency landed two big accounts. Adams decided he needed help and shifted half of the executive responsibility to Gareth Lloyd.

"You look well," Dr. Sharma said when he went to see her about mysterious spots on his ankles. They turned out to be flea-bites, a byproduct of the cat they'd acquired as company for Mariette.

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"I'm working less and enjoying it more," Adams explained.

The doctor wrote a prescription for a soothing ointment. "Are things all right for you at the clinic?" she asked.

"Yes, I'm seeing one of the junior doctors. It's only every three months to check my lithium level."

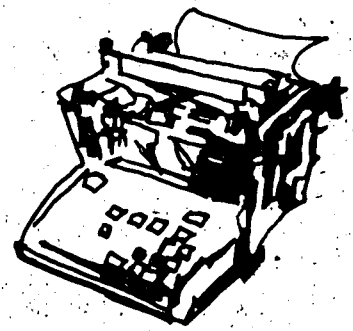
She handed over the prescription. "I'm sorry I didn't listen to you last summer. We might have arranged some help for Dr. Farrow instead of leaving a sick man to wander into the sea."

"Don't blame yourself," Adams said. "I was there, I should have saved him."

That night, after dinner, he went into his study and sat down again, facing the almost-completed manuscript. Editing it into publishable shape was turning into the hardest job he had ever tackled. There was no guarantee he would persuade a publisher to accept it, either. For all he knew, he would sweat over this project throughout eternity—he was the ancient mariner and Farrow's book was his albatross.

He went back to the beginning and turned the first page. The dedication fascinated him—he read it again while his heart beat faster:

> "To my dear friend Luke Adams,
> without whose devoted assistance
> this project would never have been completed."



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a *NEW* short story by

GEORGE BAXT

Coming from St. Martin's in October is George Baxt's new novel, The Dorothy Parker Murder Case, *involving Dorothy Parker and the entire Algonquin Round Table in a sensational murder that takes place in 1926. In the meantime—*

"What a mean, ugly room," said Gertrude. The blood stains had not been successfully scrubbed from the floor.

"If we could only find a clue!" said Alice.

"Yes," agreed Gertrude, "a clue is a clue is a clue . . ."

GERTRUDE AND ALICE AND SPITE AND MALICE

by GEORGE BAXT

Gertrude Stein was losing the battle of the belt. Morosely, she let it out another notch. Her friend and companion, Alice B. Toklas, stood near the stove in their spotless kitchen with her arms folded, waiting for the inevitable admonition. It was a short wait.

"I'm getting fat on your cooking." Getting fatter would have been more like it, but Alice was not about to rewrite Gertrude. "Oh, what a look of reproof on your face, pussy." Gertrude's voice was warm and loving. "You know I can't resist your magnificent cuisine."

"I know, lovey," replied Alice. "What you could try resisting are second helpings. I was planning on trying my new recipe tonight, but now I'm not so sure."

"Oh, don't take me so seriously." Gertrude began bustling about, trying to decide where to hang a painting—a painting she disliked intensely but had been forced upon her by a young artist they both adored and deplored. They adored him because he was a charmer

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and deplored him because his artistic talent was minuscule. "What's the new recipe?" Gertrude's eyes twinkled with expectation.

Alice sat on a stool and resumed compiling her marketing list. "It's a dish with a motif inspired by the Egyptian exhibit at the Louvre." They had visited the exhibit the previous day and expressed astonishment at how the ancient art techniques seemed almost as fresh and modern as those of the current year, 1922. Alice took a breath and then announced the name of her new culinary creation. "Pork Cheops."

"Oh, pussy, how marvelous!" Gertrude was holding the painting against the wall over the sink, but that location didn't prove to be suitable at all. In despair, she pleaded, "Help me, pussy! Where do I hang Ivan's obscenity?"

"In the outhouse."

"We don't use it any more now that we've got indoor plumbing." Gertrude was very proud of the home they shared on the Rue de Fleurs, especially now that her brother Leo had moved out into quarters of his own. Almost every square inch of wall space in every room of the house was covered with paintings Gertrude had been acquiring and would continue to acquire for the rest of her life. But sadly, what she held in her hands was an unwanted orphan—and Gertrude had always been a pushover for tragic orphans, especially since her experiences helping to house the young victims of the recent great war. Now she was holding the painting over the stove. "How about here?"

Alice shook her head violently. "Not where I have to look at it preparing three meals a day."

"Well, it has to hang *someplace* before Ivan arrives for dinner tonight! Did you have to ask him for dinner tonight?"

"Ivan always dines with us on Friday. It's a ritual and it's your fault. You started it."

"I loathe rituals and I loathe my faults. When will I ever be perfect?"

"You must never be perfect, lovey. Then there'll be nothing for you to look forward to."

Gertrude stared at the painting with undisguised disgust. It was a maze of curlicues and arcs and staggered lines and made absolutely no sense to her whatsoever. "Poor Ivan. There's no future in his future."

"He's having an affair with his landlady."

"I know."

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"Who told you?"

"Ivan did."

"Why didn't you tell me? Why did I have to hear it from the baker?"

"If you heard it from me, there'd be no reason to exchange gossip with the baker, and you know how you love to gossip with all the tradespeople. Does that make sense?"

"You always make sense, lovey, even when you don't make sense."

"How about here?"

"On the door to the larder?"

"Why not? When Ivan's not about, you can leave the door ajar and that'll obscure it. What do you think?"

Alice had finished making her list and placed the slip of paper in her handbag. "Does that thing have a name?"

"Ivan calls it *Premonition and Prediction.*"

"How pretentious. I'm off to do the shopping. Go ahead—nail it to the larder door. It has to hang somewhere and it might as well be there."

"You're so pragmatic, pussy." The electric light in the kitchen began to flicker. "Damn. We've got to get this place rewired."

"You've been saying that for months."

"I know. The electrician says the cost would be prohibitive. Why did I have to rent a house that rarely catches the sun?"

"Lovey, you know full well you're your own sun. Well, I'm off to do the shopping."

"What about the wine?"

"We'll let Ivan select one from the cellar. You know how he looks forward to selecting the wine. It makes him feel so important."

"I'm worried about this affair with his landlady. What's her name? Madame Redan?"

"Felice Redan. She used to pose for a living. She's posed for Pablo and for Modigliani."

"Has she?" Gertrude was looking for a nail and a hammer in the tool chest. "Do you suppose she poses for Ivan?"

"Among others." Alice was putting a hat pin through a rather ugly creation she had carefully placed on her head.

"And Monsieur Redan? Doesn't he suspect what's going on between his wife and their boarder?"

"From what I've heard of Hubert Redan, he is a complaisant cuckold. Apparently, his wife's favors have been sampled and appreciated by a variety of gentlemen in the neighborhood."

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"Meaning she's a nymphomaniac?"

"Meaning that in her own way, she's a busy body." Alice was now struggling into her gloves. Gertrude found a nail and the hammer and was attacking the larder door. "Is there anything I can get you while I'm out shopping?"

"Nothing, pussy. Just hurry back. Every moment you're away from me is an eternity."

There was a violent argument under way in the butcher shop when Alice entered fifteen minutes later. The opponents were Ivan's landlady, Felice Redan, and the butcher, Maurice Lange, who looked exactly as a butcher should look, especially a French one. He wore a straw hat that obscured three quarters of his profuse head of red hair. A blood-stained apron covered his shirt and trousers and he wielded his meat cleaver with the delicate finesse of an Olympics javelin-thrower. Alice liked his look, and Gertrude also approved, having only recently written of him in her notebook: "His look is a look I like to look at and like."

"*Bonjour!*" trumpeted Alice, thereby aborting the argument. The butcher returned her greeting while Madame Redan turned and flounced out of the shop. Alice noticed that she had made no purchase. "She's forgotten her purchase?" asked Alice.

"No, Mademoiselle Toklas, she only came to complain about yesterday's chicken."

"How could anyone complain about your chickens?" asked Alice with genuine sincerity. "They're the best, most fresh and plumpest chickens in all of Paris. I wish I wanted one now but I don't. I want three large pork chops—in fact, no, I think I'd better have five large pork chops. Our guest is an artist and they're always suffering from a voracious hunger. Miss Stein might also want a second helping—I wish she wouldn't but she will. —You're still angry, Monsieur."

"Forgive me, I'm sorry. You said you wanted a chicken?"

"That isn't what I said at all. I want five large pork chops." She was beginning to wonder if the argument had really been about a disappointing chicken. "Would you rather I came back later? I could do the baker and the cheese shop first—"

"Oh, no, no, no. Please, sit down. Now, what size chicken would you like?" he asked sincerely.

That night, Ivan Knotts stood in the kitchen, admiring his paint-

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ing. "It looks rather nice on the larder door," he said. He didn't hear Gertrude and Alice exhale sighs of relief.

"You look a bit peaked," said Gertrude. "Haven't you been well?"

Ivan sat on a chair, took a sip of his aperitif, and then replied to his kind friend. "I've had a terrible week. I've been working overtime every night since Monday. I refused tonight. I wouldn't think of missing our Friday dinner."

Ivan worked for the costumier who supplied the Folies Bergere and other nightclub revues. He hand-painted costumes, a job at which he was quite skilled. It paid a pittance, but enough to support the roof over his head and provide him with the meager meals he ate other than those provided by friends such as Gertrude and Alice. His fingers were heavily stained with paint, not because he was untidy, but because scrub away at his hands as he did, it was almost impossible to rid them of the paint stains. Every Saturday night before his bath, he diligently applied alcohol to his hands so that they were always clean for Sunday Mass.

Ivan was sniffing the air. "It smells delicious. What wine shall we have with it?"

"I think a Macon would be appropriate," suggested Alice. "Why don't we select a bottle now? Lovey, keep an eye on the stove. If it begins to bubble, turn the flame down a fraction—but only a fraction."

"Only a fraction, which is a fraction of a fraction and therefore a fraction of a fraction." Gertrude smiled benignly as Alice and Ivan went to the wine cellar.

In the basement, Ivan pried open the door to the wine cellar, and as he groped for the light switch Alice emitted a cry of astonishment. "Your hands! What's wrong with your hands? They're glowing in the dark!"

Ivan laughed and explained. "I've been working with phosphorescent paint. It's a new number for the Folies. In the middle of the dance, the lights will go out and the girls' costumes will glow just as my hands now glow!"

"Oh, my dear!" said Alice as Ivan found the light switch. "I thought you were suffering from some strange affliction. What a startling effect!"

"It's meant to be startling," said Ivan softly. "It's a new kind of paint. That's progress, don't you agree?"

"Oh, I'm all for progress," said Alice, "as long as it doesn't leave me behind . . ."

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Dinner was over sooner than Alice expected. Neither Gertrude nor Ivan indulged in a second helping. "You didn't like my Pork Cheops!" exclaimed Alice, each word dripping with chagrin.

"Oh, I did!" said Gertrude, patting her stomach. "But you yourself said I should restrict myself to one helping."

"And you must forgive me," said Ivan, "but I haven't had much appetite lately."

"I noticed you picking at your food," chided Alice. "No display of appetite one expects from our red-blooded American youth. What's wrong? Is it your affair with your landlady?"

"Oh, Alice, how unsubtle," chided Gertrude.

"How can one be unsubtle about something that is no longer subtle? The entire arrondissement is talking about it."

"That's because there's been such a paucity of gossip in the neighborhood of late. Well, Ivan, fess up. What do you see in this woman, anyway? Is it because she's so handy, living under the same roof as you do?"

"I'm truly in love with her," Ivan said in a very weak voice.

"But she's a married woman. What about her husband?"

"He says nothing."

"Beware of men who say nothing when they're being cheated on by their wives," warned Gertrude. "They're like dormant volcanoes. Suddenly and without warning, they erupt and you're inundated with the lava of their hatred. I'd move out of that place if I were you, Ivan Knotts. You can come stay with us for a while, if you like. Can't he, pussy?"

"Oh, most certainly. We can put him in the attic." Alice refrained from adding, Along with all those paintings you wish you'd never bought.

"You're both so kind to me. But moving out won't solve the problem." Ivan was staring at his paint-stained hands. "Felice says she loves me, too—that she wishes to leave Hubert."

"Well, why doesn't she?" demanded Gertrude.

"Hubert has told her she'll get nothing if she leaves him. She can't support herself otherwise."

"She could go back to modeling," suggested Alice.

"There's too much younger competition," said Ivan. "Besides, modeling never paid much. I'm so unhappy."

Gertrude and Alice exchanged glances. Then Gertrude leaned forward in a pose once captured on canvas by Picasso and said, "We've heard a great deal about Felice Redan, and none of it is commend-

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able. We've heard she is spiteful and malicious and is a practising nymphomaniac."

Ivan sighed heavily. They were telling him nothing he didn't already know. They didn't understand that regardless of a person's shortcomings, one could still be deeply, hopelessly in love with them.

"She had a very unpleasant altercation with the butcher today," contributed Alice. "I was a witness to the tail end of it. It left Monsieur Lange totally unnerved. I mean, much as I requested pork chops, he kept trying to shower me with chickens. And you know how impeccable an artiste in butchery he usually is."

Ivan stifled a sob and fled from the house. The women were startled. Then Gertrude broke the silence by clucking her tongue. "Oh, the poor boy," she said, "he is in such pain. Such terrible pain. Pussy, I think I'd like that other pork chop."

The following morning, when Felice Redan went to Ivan Knotts' room, presumably to tidy it up, she found him lying prone on the floor, the back of his skull crushed. He was fully dressed. The window, leading to the roof of a tool shed, was wide open, the dirty curtains billowing in the breeze.

Felice's shrieks brought her husband, some neighbors, and, eventually, the police. Felice kept wringing her hands and crying to her husband, "Why did you do it? Why? Why, Hubert, why?" The neighbors reported they had heard sounds of a violent argument between two men the previous night and the voices were identified as belonging to the landlord and the ungifted artist. Hubert Redan was taken into custody. Madame Redan was offered no sympathy—she was that thoroughly despised.

Gertrude and Alice were distraught. They had cabled Ivan's family in San Francisco the news of the terrible tragedy, then gone about the sad business of arranging for his funeral.

They received permission from the police to take away his sparse belongings and store them in their attic. Madame Redan gave them no assistance and remained in seclusion behind the closed doors of her back parlor. "What a mean, ugly room," said Gertrude. The blood stains had not been successfully scrubbed from the floor, reminding Alice of Ivan's paint-stained fingers.

"His fingers glowed," said Alice in an almost ghostly whisper.

"Not with talent, they didn't," said Gertrude.

"From traces of phosphorescent paint," explained Alice, applying herself to stacking and tying up the late young man's canvases.

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"Well, you *said* Hubert Redan was like a dormant volcano. He certainly erupted."

Gertrude stared out the window at the roof of the shed. "Hubert Redan is such a small man. The police haven't found a weapon, have they?"

"Not that I know of."

"This room is so easily accessible to anyone planning to invade it," said Gertrude. "It's a simple matter of climbing atop the roof of the shed, coming through the window, and *voila!*"

Alice folded her hands in her lap. "You don't believe Hubert Redan murdered Ivan."

"Not altogether, I don't. Felice Redan dispensed her favors like a Santa Claus gone berserk. There could be any number of men jealous of her relationship to Ivan."

"If we could only find a clue!"

"Yes," agreed Gertrude, "a clue is a clue is a clue. Still, we'd better get on with it. It's getting late."

When their taxi pulled up at the Rue de Fleurs an hour later, they saw their housekeeper, Madame Renier, standing in the doorway crying out in despair. It seemed the lights had gone out through the house and there was something strange going on in the kitchen. A gendarme, attracted by Madame Renier's pitiful cries, appeared with a flashlight and led the way to the kitchen, while Madame Renier was sent to fetch the electrician. In the kitchen, Gertrude let out a cry of triumph.

Alice was transfixed. The gendarme at first thought they were both insane. But then, when he lowered his flashlight from the larder door, he realized that portions of the painting hanging there were glowing eerily.

"Phosphorescent paint!" exclaimed Alice. "It's phosphorescent paint! We must call the police at once! There's the murderer! Ivan knew he was going to be murdered and put his suspicions to the brush!"

"If he had only told us," said Gertrude sadly.

"What could we have done? How could we act on a mere suspicion? But here—" Alice pointed at Ivan Knotts' final work "—here at least it's in phosphorescent paint!" She gestured at the gendarme. "We must send for your superiors at once! They must see the painting!"

The gendarme went for his superiors himself, and the gentlemen were truly astonished by the painting. The phosphorescent paint

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outlined an accurate portrait of the butcher, Maurice Lange, wielding a meat cleaver.

When the lights eventually came on, the portrait was obscured and lost in the artist's seemingly untalented criss-crosses. The police left with the painting, and though it took more than twenty-four hours of brutal cross-examination, Maurice Lange finally broke and confessed that he had murdered Ivan Knotts. If the landlord, Hubert Redan, had not been arrested, convicted, and guillotined for the crime, he told them further, he too was marked for the butcher's cleaver.

"I had an idea that might be the story, Pussy," said Gertrude at dinner the following Friday night, when they welcomed a new protégé, a young Belgian who finger-daubed, and whose dirty hands reminded them warmly of the late Ivan Knotts. "I knew that spiteful and malicious Felice was in on it with the butcher. He was the one she really meant to run away with. Ivan and the husband were in the way—Ivan like a persistent puppy dog whining for affection, the husband a man of pride who would not yield financially to his defecting wife."

"Have you told this to the police?" asked Alice, as she covered the young Belgian's plate with a third helping of her latest specialty, *Gigot à la Belgique*. "I mean, do they, too, suspect Felice was the butcher's accomplice?"

"Oh, yes. She broke this morning. I must confess, I did send them my suspicions in writing a few days ago. Isn't it remarkable?" said Gertrude, as she helped herself to a sixth generous slice of gigot. "They understood it completely. So much for those who say I'm undecipherable!"

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a *NEW* Pierre Chambrun story by

HUGH PENTECOST

Jerry Dodd reported no trace of the journalist. But she was known and no one had seen her leave the hotel.

"I don't believe she's left the hotel," Chambrun said, still studying his lists . . .

CHAMBRUN AND THE 422 NAMES

by HUGH PENTECOST

There are many extraordinary things about Pierre Chambrun, the legendary manager of The Beaumont, New York City's top luxury hotel, but to me the most unusual is his total knowledge of the people who work for him.

The Beaumont is, in effect, a city within a city. It has its own bars, restaurants, shops in the lobby arcade, a branch of a big bank, beauty salons and barber shops, a health club, a hospital, its own police force, and maintenance crews. Sitting on top of it all is the mayor—Pierre Chambrun. A short, stocky little man with dark hair and bright-blue eyes that can be warm and compassionate or cold as a hanging judge's, Chambrun is aware of every detail of the complex operation. "When I don't know what's going on in every nook and cranny of this place, it will be time for me to retire," he's told me.

But the unusual thing I've referred to is his intimate knowledge of every one of the several hundred people who work for him—their home lives, their marital status, their children, their health records. He will stop the lowliest member of a clean-up crew with a "Hello, Ed—how's that boy of yours doing in his new school?" or "Michael,

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is your wife's health improving?" They all think of him as a caring father. He will ask me, with a twinkle in his eyes: "I hesitate to ask you how your lady is, Mark, because, is she the same lady?" It's a joke among the people close to him that I fall in love forever every three months. I'm Mark Haskell—I've been head of public relations for The Beaumont for the last ten years.

Certain routines never change. Every morning at eight, Chambrun is served a gourmet breakfast in his elegant office on the second floor.The breakfast is hearty and he doesn't eat again until dinner at night. At nine on the dot, Betsy Ruysdale, his fabulous secretary, who most of us think is more to him than a secretary or executive assistant, and I join him to go over the registration cards from the night before. The Beaumont's guests would be surprised to know how much we know about them.

Each registration card indicates a credit rating and if the guest is married or single, A is for alcoholic, MX for a man double-crossing his wife, WX for a woman double-crossing her husband, and there are special indications when Chambrun himself has special knowledge of a guest or there is a history connected with his or her previous time spent at the hotel. My share in this has to do with special handling of people. There are always United Nations diplomats who need special attention, Hollywood stars who want to be anonymous—or who want to be publicized. I protect them from the press or get the press to them, depending on their wishes.

On this particular morning, Jerry Dodd, head of security for the hotel, joined us. I suppose Betsy Ruysdale, Jerry, and I are the closest members of the staff to Chambrun. Jerry—dark, wiry, very intense—is a former F.B.I. agent.

"Sorry to butt in," Jerry said, "but I wanted you to know something, boss."

Chambrun looked up from the registration cards he was examining. "From the look of you, Jerry, I'd say the hotel isn't on fire," he said.

"Just a disappointment," Jerry said. "Joe Morgan."

For a moment I had to try to remember who Joe Morgan was. One of Jerry's security force?

"What about him?"

"I'm afraid he's fallen off the wagon."

"I doubt it," Chambrun said.

"I'm afraid there's no doubt," Jerry said. "A little after nine o'clock last night—Joe was off duty then—Mike Maggio was helping a guest

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check out and saw him in the lobby. He was staggering, bumping into furniture, zigzagging across the open space—way out of control." Maggio is the night bell captain. "As soon as he was free, Mike tried to find Joe, but he couldn't. And Joe hasn't shown up for work this morning."

I had Joe Morgan in focus now. He'd been hired six or seven years ago to fill a vacancy on the security force. He'd come highly recommended, a former intelligence officer in the Air Force. It turned out he had an alcoholic problem. To my surprise at the time, Chambrun didn't fire him. Instead, he got him to an A.A. man.

"We've got a good man with a problem," Chambrun said at the time.

Joe Morgan had apparently been clean since then—until last night.

"What about his family?" I said. "They'll know."

"He has no family," Chambrun told me. "He lives alone in an apartment a couple of blocks from here. Get me his phone number, Ruysdale, and get me Max Rowan's too. He's his A.A. contact."

He neuters Ruysdale by never using her first name. I often wonder what he calls her in private.

She produced two phone numbers from his private file almost before he'd finished asking.

Joe Morgan's home phone didn't answer, but Chambrun was able to reach the A.A. man. "Could Joe Morgan have tipped off the wagon, Max?—Yes, I thought not. But someone saw him staggering around last night and he hasn't turned up for work this morning. Yes—well, thanks, Max. Yes, I think you're right." Chambrun put down the phone. "No way," he said.

"But Mike Maggio saw him," Jerry protested.

"Sick or hurt, not drunk," Chambrun said. "Have a couple of your people go over this place from top to bottom. I know Joe, Jerry. He was cured. Nothing on earth would start him off again. He's got some other kind of trouble."

To cut it short, about twenty minutes later Chambrun got a call from Ora Veach, chief operator on our switchboard. The phone in Room 610 had been off the hook since about nine-thirty the night before. Ms. Veach had sent someone down to check and found a DO NOT DISTURB sign on the door of 610. She wanted permission to send the housekeeper in.

"I'll see to it," Chambrun said.

He checked with the front desk. The guest in 610 was Francine

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Kelsey, a woman reporter for International Press. She could have taken the phone off the hook to avoid being disturbed—or there could be something wrong.

Mrs. Kniffen, the housekeeper for that area, checked back with Chambrun ten minutes after he'd ordered her to go into 610. She sounded shaken.

"There's a man on the bed in the room, Mr. Chambrun. Blood everywhere. I think he's dead."

The man on the bed in 610 was Joe Morgan. He wasn't dead, but Dr. Partridge, our house physician, didn't think he'd make it. He had gunshot wounds in the stomach, chest, and arm. "He must have been bleeding for hours," Dr. Partridge told Chambrun. "Odds? Like one in a hundred. Talk? Not now. Maybe never."

Francine Kelsey, who should have been in 610, was missing. Her home base was Washington, D.C. Chambrun called International Press there. Yes, Ms. Kelsey was on assignment in New York. As far as they knew, she was staying at The Beaumont. Her assignment? The man to whom Chambrun was talking said he would have to talk to someone higher up for that answer. He would call back.

"She could have been playing the other side of the street," Jerry Dodd suggested. "Joe Morgan stumbled on something she was up to and she shot him."

"Mike saw him staggering around the lobby before he ever got to that room," Chambrun said. He turned to Mike Maggio, who had been called in from his time off. "Did you notice if he was holding onto his stomach or his arm, Mike?"

Mike Maggio, one of our most trusted people, is a bright, streetwise young man. "He was holding onto his gut," Mike said. "I thought he was going to be sick. Knowing Joe's history, I thought he was drunk. I didn't want to call attention to him, but as soon as I got my guest off in his taxi I started looking for him."

A man near death from gunshot wounds is a matter for the police. Lieutenant Hardy, Manhattan Homicide, is an old friend and we were lucky to have him assigned to the case. There have been murders in the hotel in the past, just as there are in any city, large or small. Chambrun and Hardy knew each other and respected each other's special gifts. Chambrun is intuitive, sometimes almost mercurial. He follows hunches and is inclined to dream up answers without the facts that will substantiate them. Hardy is slow, dogged,

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step-by-step in his approach, and has often come up with the evidence that made Chambrun's theories hold water.

Chambrun took off with Hardy to have a look at Room 610. Fingerprint men and police photographers would be on hand to check out the room. Jerry Dodd and his staff were assigned to try to find out what Joe Morgan had been up to before Mike Maggio had seen him staggering around the lobby the night before. I was to keep pressuring International Press for information about Francine Kelsey—what she had been working at and where her assignment might have taken her.

I should have known that Betsy Ruysdale would come up with every scrap of information Chambrun might need without his asking for anything specific. She put a folder down on his desk, where I was sitting at the time. "File on Joe Morgan," she said.

There were files like this on every employee in the hotel, from the most recently hired busboy to Chambrun himself. Some contained biographies covering numbers of years, some just a few sentences indicating marital status, previous employment, and up-to-date reports of performance as a hotel worker. Joe Morgan's covered quite a lot of ground.

He had been born in a small town in Vermont, gone to elementary and high school there, and then to Middlebury College, where he'd graduated in the top third of his class. From there he'd enlisted in the Air Force, earned his wings, and been commissioned Lieutenant. He'd been assigned to Air Force intelligence, stationed in the Middle East. He'd served on the carrier *Nimitz* in the waters off Libya. He'd later been assigned as an advisor to the Egyptian Air Force. He'd evidently become so well informed about the Mideast cauldron that he'd been detached from the Air Force and assigned to the C.I.A., operating out of Washington.

From there on, the information about him was somewhat puzzling. After only three weeks in the C.I.A. he was dismissed "without prejudice." Alcoholism then appeared on his record. Whether drinking was the cause of his dismissal wasn't stated, although an alcoholic agent is not someone the Agency would want to have around. It seemed logical to assume it was the reason he'd been fired. After that, Morgan had held half a dozen different jobs, each succeeding one a little less important, all ending in firings because of his drinking.

Then a friend of Chambrun's in the State Department had recommended him as a possibility for a security job at The Beaumont.

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That was not explained in the folder. Why had Chambrun hired a man with such a record? He must have been convinced that Morgan was worth taking a chance on. He had, in fact, led him to Alcoholics Anonymous, and Morgan's record for the last six years at The Beaumont had been spotless. He had been a model of efficiency and dependability, and there were a half dozen instances where he'd been extremely helpful with problems involving Mideast diplomats. Not a suggestion that he'd had any problems with liquor.

And then last night—what?

I had just put down the folder with that unanswered question on my mind when Betsy Ruysdale told me a man from the local office of International Press was in the outer office, asking for Chambrun. She thought I might be able to help him. The press are supposed to be my meat.

Fred Watson of I.P. was a man in his late fifties, I guessed, grey-haired, square-jawed, sharp-eyed. The Washington office had called him with questions about Francine Kelsey. He was concerned. Where was she?

I let him have it—our discovery of Joe Morgan critically wounded in her room and no sign of the lady.

"This Morgan works for the hotel?" Watson asked.

"Security."

"When did Fran disappear?" he asked.

"We don't have any idea," I told him. "She may not be missing. She didn't have any reason to tell us she was going anywhere. All we know at the moment is that her phone went off the hook about nine-thirty last night and it stayed off all night. When we went to her room this morning to see what was wrong, we found Morgan wounded and bleeding to death on her bed."

"Do you know why he would have been in her room?"

"No idea." I told him about Mike Maggio seeing Morgan the night before and assuming he was drunk.

"Is there any reason your security man should have been interested in Fran Kelsey?"

"Not officially."

"Meaning what?"

"The hotel didn't have any interest in Miss Kelsey except as a guest. By that I mean there were no special instructions about her, nor had she asked for help of any sort—that we know of so far."

"Your Mr. Chambrun asked the Washington office what her assignment was," Watson said. "Under the circumstances, I'll tell you.

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She was on the trail of someone selling arms and top-secret technology to Libyan terrorists. She thought it might be someone connected to the United Nations. The Beaumont was a logical place for her to stay. You have a number of U.N. people staying here."

"Dozens," I said.

"We should look in her room for any notes or records she may have," Watson said.

"I'll call down to 610," I said. "Mr. Chambrun is down there with the police."

I was just reaching for the phone when Betsy Ruysdale came back into the office. "Eddie Clayton is here with information that may be useful to you and Mr. Watson," she said.

Eddie Clayton is the head bartender on the night shift in the Trapeze Bar.

Eddie is a jovial, round-faced man in his forties, something of a character and very popular with the Trapeze's regular customers.

"I just heard about Joe Morgan and the Kelsey woman," he told us after I'd introduced him to Watson. "What I've got may not be anything, but they knew each other from some time back, I think."

"What makes you think that?" Watson asked.

"The Kelsey woman's been staying here what—two or three weeks, Mark?"

"I guess."

"Comes into the Trapeze every night, always with people. Always laughing and happy. Her friends seem to be mostly the U.N. crowd."

Eddie hadn't heard Watson mention the U.N., but her assignment would have had her moving that way, I thought.

"This night—about a week ago—she was at a corner table with some of the British delegation, I think. Joe Morgan was on the night shift. His regular patrol brought him through the Trapeze three or four times a night. He stopped at the bar to ask me if everything was okay, and this Kelsey doll let out a shout you could have heard in New Mexico. 'Joe!' she yelled. 'Joe Morgan!' She came racing over to him and threw her arms around him. I heard him say, 'Fran! Long time no see.' Then they walked away. I could see her trying to pull him over to join her and her friends."

"And did he?" Watson asked.

"The help don't socialize with the guests when they're on duty," Eddie said. "No, they talked a while and then he went on about his business. But I'd bet my paycheck they got together later. Old friends—maybe more than friends."

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Watson was frowning. "Morgan," he said. "Was he ever a C.I.A. agent, Mr. Haskell?"

"Short time," I said.

Watson shook his head. "A long time ago—seven or eight years, I guess—Fran had just started working for I.P. She came up with a story about some C.I.A. agent who'd been fired for no reason at all. Where she got it I don't know, but she told us this guy was a former Air Force man—intelligence—and that he might have come up with something when he was working in Egypt or someplace that could have been something the C.I.A. didn't want disclosed or investigated. I just remembered that the guy she said got fired was named Morgan."

I glanced down at the folder I'd just been reading. "It could fit," I said. "Our Joe Morgan was Air Force intelligence, was in Egypt, and was fired by the C.I.A. after only three weeks."

At that moment, Chambrun and Lieutenant Hardy came back from Room 610. We brought them up to date on Eddie's story of Morgan's meeting with Francine Kelsey in the Trapeze Bar and Watson's information. When he mentioned that Francine Kelsey was after an arms salesman to Libyan terrorists, he said, "Your Mr. Morgan could have been trying to help Fran and got into trouble."

Chambrun's eyes had that cold, hanging judge's look to them. "Morgan is an experienced man, not likely to walk into an ambush—"

"It's not reasonable to suppose he shot himself," Hardy said.

"But he *did* walk into some kind of ambush," Chambrun concluded. "According to Doc Partridge, he was shot a half dozen times."

"That kind of shooting in a hotel—wouldn't someone have heard?" Watson asked.

"All the guest rooms in the hotel are soundproofed," Chambrun said. "You could fire off a cannon in some of them and it wouldn't be heard in the next room."

"So we start at square one," Hardy said. "We don't know who shot Morgan or why. We don't know where it happened. We don't know if the Kelsey woman let him into 610 or if he had a key to her room. We don't know why she—or someone else—took the telephone off the hook and left it off. We don't know where she is, so we can't get any information from her, and we may never get any from Morgan."

He looked at Watson. "Someone she worked for must know who Francine Kelsey was looking for in connection with her story."

"Not necessarily," Watson said. "She was looking for *an* arms

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salesman. She may not have known herself who it was. I didn't know. If someone in Washington knows, they'd have told us by now. A good investigative reporter doesn't necessarily talk about his story until he has something solid."

"But she might have talked about it to Morgan, who was apparently an old friend," Hardy said.

"She'll tell us when she turns up," Watson said.

"*If* she turns up," Chambrun said, in a cold, flat voice. "But we're not quite at square one. Mike Maggio saw Morgan staggering across the lobby toward the south bank of elevators. We have to believe then that he came from the north side. Someone, the Kelsey woman or someone else, let him into 610. There was no key on him, according to Doc Partridge. We don't know who took the phone off the hook. It could be that Morgan, left bleeding to death on the bed, reached for the phone and dropped it."

"And Francine Kelsey just left him to die?" Hardy asked.

"They were friends. That's unlikely. Every instinct I have tells me the lady is in big trouble somewhere."

"Damn!" Watson said.

"So now we check to see who Morgan may have gone to see on the north wing of the building," Hardy said.

"Several hundred people," I heard myself say.

"That many rooms?" Hardy asked.

"With double occupancy, that many people," I explained.

"It may not be that difficult," Chambrun said. "We have records on every guest. Almost every one of them has a history that would make it senseless to suspect them."

"He was off duty," Hardy said. "He was investigating something personal, wouldn't you say?"

"No one who works for us is ever off duty if he knows of something that threatens our normal functioning in any way," Chambrun said. "If someone is using the hotel as a base for illegal arms sales, that threatens us. Morgan got himself shot for investigating something. Whatever it was, he needed some kind of information before he checked in with Jerry or me. He didn't make it."

"You trusted him?" Watson asked.

Chambrun gave the I.P. man a sour look. "He's been working for me for more than six years. Would he be here if I didn't trust him?"

"An alcoholic?"

"A cured alcoholic," Chambrun said. "Maybe more trustworthy than someone who'd never had the problem."

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Betsy Ruysdale appeared and put down a sheaf of paper on Chambrun's desk. "The people registered in the north wing," she said. "There are four hundred and twenty-two of them."

"One question," Hardy said. "Doc Partridge said Morgan was wearing an empty gun holster. Would he be carrying a gun when he was off duty?"

"Why not?" Chambrun said. "He's licensed to carry it at all times."

"Then where is it?"

"When we know that, Walter, we may have all the answers," Chambrun said.

Hardy and Watson took off and Chambrun sat at his desk, going through the sheaf of names Betsy Ruysdale had brought him. He tossed one page after another aside. Four hundred and twenty-two names! But most of them had been guests at The Beaumont a number of times before, which made his task easier. Jerry Dodd came in while he was still at it.

"No trace of the Kelsey woman," Jerry reported. "But she was in the Trapeze at the cocktail hour last night. Eddie remembered a couple of people she was with and I checked with them. She hadn't mentioned any plans for the evening. No one saw her leave the hotel—and she *was* known."

"I don't believe she's left the hotel," Chambrun said, still studying his lists of names.

"We've covered every possible place she could be hidden—or hiding," Jerry said.

Chambrun slapped the papers in front of him. "Have you checked these four hundred and twenty-two people—just in the north wing? The service areas? She could use the service elevators, up or down, and not be seen."

"The service areas aren't deserted," Jerry said. "Maids, maintenance people. We've spread the word."

Chambrun pushed his chair back from the desk. "There are just six people who are guests in the north wing that I don't know by name, by reputation, or by past visits here. Five of them are U.N. people, the reservations made by their people here. The sixth is a man named Harry Brown, a C.I.A. man. His room was reserved from the main office in Washington. Get Hardy, Jerry, and we'll go have a talk with Mr. Brown."

"Why him?" Jerry asked.

"You might try thinking for a moment," Chambrun said. "Joe

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Morgan worked in the C.I.A. here for a while, must have had contact with them when he was working for Air Force intelligence. He may know Brown. The girl may know him. He might be useful, save us wasted time and steps."

"So we fire a shot in the air," Jerry said.

"Have you a better idea?" Chambrun asked, the hanging judge again.

Ten minutes later, Chambrun, Hardy, Jerry Dodd, and I were outside the door of Room 913 in the north wing. All the rooms on the north side are odd-numbered, even those on the south side of the wing. There was a considerable delay before there was an answer to our ring at the door, but finally it was opened by a young man with dark crewcut hair and narrow eyes, Spanish-looking.

"Mr. Brown?" Chambrun asked.

"He's not here," the young man said.

"Can you tell me where he is?"

"What's it to you?"

"I'm the manager of the hotel. I need to talk with him."

"Try some other time," the young man said. He started to close the door, but Chambrun wedged his shoulder forward so it was impossible.

"If you don't mind, we'll have a look around," Chambrun said. The lie that followed was delivered dead-pan. "We've had reports of shooting in this room."

"You're off your rocker," the young man said.

But Chambrun was past him and into the room before he could be stopped, with the three of us just behind him. Nine thirteen is a small suite, with a living room, bedroom, and bath. The young man had backed toward the bedroom door, a nerve twitching high up on his cheek. There was no one else in the living room, nor any signs that it had been much used.

"What's your name?" Chambrun asked him.

"Raoul Martinez. I'm Harry Brown's partner."

"So let's have a look in the bedroom," Chambrun said.

"Look, Harry's sick," Martinez said. "He doesn't want to see anybody. He doesn't have to see anybody."

"What's the matter with him?"

"I don't know. The flu or something."

"Dr. Partridge told you it's the flu?"

"Who's Dr. Partridge? Harry had his own doctor."

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"I just want to ask him a couple of simple questions."

It was quick, very quick—quicker than my eye could follow. Martinez was suddenly pointing a gun at Chambrun. "You've got no rights in here," he said.

Chambrun's face looked carved out of rock. He didn't look to us for help. "It may give you some personal pleasure to fire that weapon at me, Martinez," he said, "but I promise you that one second after you pull the trigger, you will be very dead."

Martinez, looking past him, saw that Jerry Dodd and Lieutenant Hardy had both drawn guns.

"Drop it—on the count of one!" Jerry Dodd said.

I was too frozen to move. I was in the line of fire both ways. Luckily, Martinez didn't have what it took. He dropped his gun on the thick carpet. Chambrun stepped past him and opened the bedroom door. On the bed was a big grey-haired man, propped up on his elbows. He had obviously been listening hard.

"What the hell's going on?" he asked in a hoarse-sounding voice.

"Mr. Brown?" Chambrun asked.

"Yes."

"C.I.A.?"

"Yes."

"I understand you're ill."

"I have some kind of bug. What is this?"

"I wondered if it might be a gunshot wound," Chambrun said.

"I know you. You're Pierre Chambrun, the hotel manager," Brown said. "A gunshot wound! You must be out of your mind!"

"My faculties may not be all they should be," Chambrun granted, "but my hearing is still perfect. There's someone in the bathroom, Jerry. See who it is."

I heard it then. It sounded like someone dropping the john seat down on the enamel base.

Jerry Dodd, his gun at the ready, pushed open the bathroom door. Sitting on the floor under the washbasin was a blonde woman. Her hands were tied behind her to the water pipes. Her feet, tied together in front of her, were just able to reach the lid of the john. Across her mouth was a wide strip of adhesive tape.

Jerry knelt down beside her. "This is going to hurt, lady," he said. He took a corner of the adhesive tape and gave it a sharp yank off her mouth. Before he could reach for the ropes that tied her wrists and ankles, she was shouting at us.

"Joe Morgan! He's in my room—six ten! He's badly hurt!"

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"We've found him, Miss Kelsey," Chambrun said.

"Is he all right?" she asked.

"When Jerry gets you untied, you can join us in crossing your fingers," Chambrun said. He turned to Lieutenant Hardy. "Your party, Walter."

It was several days before Joe Morgan, fighting gamely for his life, was able to talk and turn the guesses Chambrun made that morning into facts.

Guess number one. After Hardy had arrested Brown and Martinez, a police surgeon determined that Brown was suffering from two gunshot wounds in the stomach.

Guess number two. Chambrun suggested that the wounds had been inflicted by Joe Morgan before he himself was gunned down by Martinez.

But the basis for most guesses came from the story Francine Kelsey had to tell. She had needed a little time to freshen up from her hours of imprisonment, and when she was ready to talk, Watson, the New York International Press man, had arrived in Chambrun's office on the run, having been notified that she was safe and sound and ready to talk. Her audience, along with Watson, consisted of Chambrun, Jerry Dodd, Lieutenant Hardy, Betsy Ruysdale, and myself.

"I think you all know I was working on a story about someone selling arms and high technology to Libyan terrorists," she told us. "I hadn't come up with anything very positive, but one day in the lobby I ran into a man I knew from out of the past. He was Harry Brown, a C.I.A. agent. Brown was the man who, seven years ago, told me Joe Morgan had been dropped from the Agency because 'he didn't qualify.' He didn't give me any details back then, and he didn't now. But when I met Joe Morgan, I told him Brown was here, staying in the hotel. Joe has always wondered why he was fired and he decided to go talk to Brown.

"I know from listening to Brown and Martinez talk while they were holding me what happened. Joe went up to Brown's suite to introduce himself and talk to him. The minute he laid eyes on him he recognized him as a man suspected of dealing with the enemy when Joe was working for the Air Force in Egypt. Brown had been responsible for getting Joe fired in Washington. He knew that if Joe saw him working there, his game was up. Now the game was up again. Brown pulled a gun and opened up on Joe. Joe went down,

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but he was able to draw his own gun and fire back. He brought Brown down. Martinez saw Joe lying on the floor, thought he was out, and went to help Brown. While he was getting him into the bedroom, Joe recovered enough to struggle to his feet and escape."

"Why didn't he get to me?" Jerry Dodd asked.

"I don't know," Francine said. "He came to me. I opened my door when someone knocked and he staggered in and fell. I managed to get him onto the bed and picked up the phone to call for help. Then someone else knocked at the door. I was desperate. It could be a maid, a friend, someone who could help. I opened the door and it was Martinez. He was pointing a gun at me. He went over to the bed, looked at Joe, and told me he was dead. He didn't notice the phone off the hook. He ordered me out, put the Do Not Disturb sign on the outside doorknob, took me through the service area across to the north side and up to Brown's suite."

"Why did he run that risk?" Watson asked. "If Morgan had told you what he'd discovered, you were just as dangerous to them as he was. Why didn't he just let you have it there in your room?"

Chambrun said, "They had to have time for Brown to be well enough to move. Miss Kelsey might be a hostage they could use to buy their way out. Once they were out, they would have finished her."

"That's what I heard them say," Francine said. "They kept me alive because they might need me to talk to someone on the phone. They had to be able to prove I was alive if they were to use me to bargain with. How did you happen to find me, Mr. Chambrun?"

"A hunch," Chambrun said. "A C.I.A. man either could help me or he was it. It was very likely one or the other."

"You guessed he'd been shot. I heard you say so. What made you think that?"

"Joe's gun was missing. I was certain he'd had to use it. The reason he didn't go to you, Jerry, is that he wasn't all there. The only thing he could think of, in his befuddled state and in terrible pain, was to get to you, Miss Kelsey, and warn you you were in danger."

"Do you always hit the bull's eye on the first try, Mr. Chambrun?" Watson asked.

Chambrun gave him a mirthless smile. "Almost always, Mr. Watson. If I didn't, I'd have been out of this job long ago."

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"This is the anniversary, is it not?" said Ngala. Then: "We can dispense with the story if you wish . . ."

THE MAMBA TALE

by NICK SPENCER

At the edge of the rain forest, along the mahogany-rich coast of Cameroon, West Africa, lies the village of Kribi. High on a bluff in the residential quarter, dignitaries sit on the verandas of their white-stucco houses and gaze over the palm trees to the grey-green waters of the Atlantic.

Down a long beach below the bluff, a channel of rushing water meets the sea. The channel billows forth at its mouth, pouring the ruddy silt of the jungle into the ocean beyond it.

Ngala sat slumped in the veranda chair, smoking. He stared at the log-stacked flatboats in the channel. His eyes followed their slow progress as tugboats coaxed them into the sea toward the European cargo ships anchored near the horizon. The smoke of his Gauloise cigarette passed carelessly through his nostrils.

"François," I called.

The domestic appeared at the French doors behind us.

"Monsieur?" His face was young, innocent.

"Cognac, *s'il te plaît.*" The sun became a glowing orange between the ships. The sea was a mirror rippled only by the wings of skimming swallows.

"I tell you, Mr. Farling," the Cameroonian began, "this hot weather will be the death of me."

The houseboy reappeared and set a tray on the wrought-iron table between our chairs. Slices of brie on a small porcelain plate. I poured the amber contents of a carafe into the round snifters.

"Cognac?" I offered.

He balanced his cigarette at the edge of the table and took the glass. A breeze came up, rustling the palm fronds, ringing the wind chimes that hung from the eaves.

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"Perhaps, Mr. Farling, you do not wish to hear our tale again this year. This is the anniversary, is it not?"

He sipped his cognac, one eye on me. "We can dispense with it if you wish."

I drank, silent.

"Of course," he went on, irony in his tone, "the shame—the *real* crime—would be to let it fade from memory. Would it not?"

I nodded once without turning. His chair creaked as he propped one boot on the black-steel railing that bordered the veranda.

For a time, Ngala's lyric African English welled up a memory half a decade old. A bead of perspiration traced the bridge of my nose. The wicker of the seat bristled beneath the weight of my shoulders and I closed my eyes against the waning light until the memory wound within me like the coils of a snake.

"Ngala!"

The channel lay between us. Pools of red river-mud swirled into the sea between two banks of hot white sand. A gritty wind stung the back of my knees and carried my voice across the channel. "Ngala!" I repeated loudly.

"You called, good sir?" He bowed.

"My towel! Bring it when you cross in the skiff!" The towel lay in the shadow of a eucalyptus tree at the edge of the green forest where we'd stopped to escape the heat of the sun. Ngala turned to the towel and back to me.

"Get it yourself, Thomas! You wanted to prove you could swim this channel. Now show me you can swim back, too!"

The wind carried his laughter into the thicket.

Crazy African logger, I thought, hiding my smile. Then I ordered, "Bring me the damn *towel!*"

He flashed a wide row of ivory teeth. His muscular brown shoulders glistened with perspiration in the afternoon sun. "So it has come to this, has it, Thomas Farling? The black man fetches for the white. Even after working hours!"

I detected his familiar tongue-in-cheek tone even over the channel. He heaved a mock sigh and shook his head. "I knew our friendship couldn't last, Thomas!" he called over. "Who am I but a lowly Cameroonian woodcutter? And you, the big, big boss man of Afro-Timber!"

I looked away and pretended not to listen.

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"Such a pity!" He clucked his tongue loudly. "The loggers always thought you were different!"

A swelling sea breeze made the hearing difficult, but I knew what he meant. In my ten years as a bush manager for the lumber-exporting Afro-Timber Corporation, I'd become a legend among the local logging crews. I was the boss with real muscle—not some desk jockey who barked orders. I could scale a tree trunk, wield a machete, handle a chainsaw as well as the best logger in the region, and still play the boss role to the hilt. There was more to this job than good money. There were things I couldn't find anywhere else. Respect. Admiration.

A strong gust of hot air combed the beach. I squinted past Ngala to the spot where my towel had been.

He traced the path of my gaze.

"Your towel—" he chimed "—it seems our fine African bush has swallowed it."

He trotted, half naked, up the incline and vanished for a moment in the jungle. I peeled off my soaking work shirt and felt the sun as it baked a film of russet mud on my knuckles.

"Thomas!"

I shot a glance at the opposite bank.

"Help me—mamba!"

For five stunned seconds I watched him as he clutched one arm, twisted, staggered. I dove into the water, numb. Somewhere inside me time began to tick.

Mamba! There is no utterance more paralyzing in the lingo of the African bush. The green stick. A snake so deadly that mere minutes separate death from life.

The skiff was anchored in the shallows. My scallop knife lay in the stern. I grabbed the handle, ran. I stumbled over the anchor chain, sprawling into the rusty murk, rising now, racing against a clock I could not see.

"Ngala!" Footprints led me to the place where he'd dropped in the sand, writhing.

I straddled his middle, prying his hand from the tiny red punctures below the elbow. Beneath me he was a horse, a bucking creature in the throes of terror.

"For God's sake, lie still!" The scallop knife. I was cutting now. Then sucking, spitting out, pressing the upper arm. Blood came out blood—red, pure red. The towel! The perfect tourniquet! I bolted away over the sand for it.

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"Thomas! Don't go there!"

The forest was a wall, an uncompromising entanglement, a giant with no name and no heart. Trees began to whirl. Leaves spun. The world turned before my eyes in a pattern with no end and no beginning.

My eyelids opened to the click of glass on iron—an empty snifter set on the table. Ngala's profile was a dim silhouette in the light of the fading kerosene lamp that dangled from a chain overhead. His shadow swayed from side to side on the plaster wall behind him as a breeze moved the lamp to and fro like a pendulum.

"The crime, Mr. Farling, is that you were not the victim! *I* was!" He leaned toward me, picking up a piece of brie. Through the sleeve of his opposite shoulder a stump protruded where an arm had been. "Delicious, Mr. Farling. I do trust this cheese was cut with a clean knife."

I stood, avoiding his eyes, avoiding him.

"So soon?" he queried. "You wish me to leave so soon? Leave before the end of the tale?"

He drew himself up to the edge of his chair. I walked to one end of the veranda, my back to him.

"Are you awake? You must excuse my asking, but five years ago you missed the end of this tale."

"The heat—" I began.

"The heat, you say!" He spat over the railing. "The heat had nothing to do with it. You fainted! Passed out at the sight of a little blood. You left me in the burning sand to tie my own tourniquet with the string of my trunks! You never thought of the string, did you, Mr. Farling? I used my teeth and hand to pull it tight at the elbow."

I heard him stand, felt his eyes upon me.

"Then I came for you. I pulled you from the treacherous jungle with what strength I had in me. Wouldn't that have been a sight for the loggers? The big boss man, white as a sheet, flat out on a pile of leaves when one of his men needs him most! What would they say about that if they knew?"

His voice rang in the ceiling of the veranda. Slowly, I pushed away from the railing, reached into the pocket of my safari shirt, and set a thick envelope on the table near him.

"I only wish—" his tone grew soft, wistful "—that the tugboat pilot in the channel hadn't taken so bloody damn long after I'd called

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out for help—that he'd taken me to the village hospital before it was too late for the arm."

Somewhere in the dark, a buoy clanged. A cradle of moon peered, like a haunted eye, over the lip of the sea. Ngala descended the veranda steps, stopping on the last one. The lantern light had burned out, leaving darkness between us. I knew he was still there by the crackle of the envelope as he opened it.

"A reasonable sum, it appears. More than last year. But try to put a few more bills in next time, won't you? It's a small price to pay for your image."

DETECTIVERSE

WARNING:
THE SURGEON GENERAL
HAS DETERMINED THAT
CIGARETTE SMOKING
IS DANGEROUS
TO YOUR HEALTH

by HAZEL HART

There once was a couple named Stoker.
The man was a cigarette smoker.
His wife sneezed and she wheezed
Till her ailment she eased
With one stroke of a fireplace poker.

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a *NEW* short story by

JOYCE HARRINGTON

It has been two years since we published a story by Joyce Harrington, but her typewriter has not been idle. She recently completed her third novel—thus, happily, giving her time to write this new short story for us.

Jaynie's father spotted Ansel Woodruff's picture in the paper. "Here he is again, putting on his do-gooder-than-thou face. That s.o.b., pardon my French, Jaynie, and pretend you didn't hear it, he'll get to be mayor one of these days, and a sad and sorry day that'll be for this town . . ."

WHY I DON'T DRINK LEMONADE

by JOYCE HARRINGTON

It all happened so long ago I'm surprised anyone remembers it. But they do. And I do.

It's not so surprising that I do. I think that when you're a child the things that happen to you and around you become part of a mythology of childhood that stays with you for life, submerged sometimes under the obvious and surface activities of growing up and finding your place in the world. Or not finding it, which may be more often the case than we like to think.

But I'm straying from the point. I do that every time I try to think about Ben and Clara and what happened that summer when I was nine and the skies were a shade of blue I've never seen since.

I didn't know much when I was nine. I knew that Eisenhower was President and something called a Cold War was going on. My interior view of that was of a global snowball fight, just as I envisioned

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the Iron Curtain as a kind of immense shower curtain made of chain mail such as knights wore in the olden days. And I knew that my cousin Ben was meeting Clara Woodruff in the parking lot behind E & S Hardware and the two of them were going off somewhere in her car and they shouldn't have been doing that. Clara was Mrs. Ansel Woodruff, and Ansel Woodruff was a big man in our town, both physically large and a looming presence in local politics. His picture was in the newspaper every other week or so, handing out an essay prize at the high school or doing something humanitarian for stray dogs or Korean War vets.

Not that I read the newspaper much in those days. I was devoted then to *Archie* comics and *Calling All Girls*. But my father was in the habit of reading the newspaper aloud to us before supper, and he detested Ansel Woodruff loudly and often. "That skunk," he'd mutter. "Here he is again, putting on his do-gooder-than-thou face. That s.o.b., pardon my French, Jaynie, and pretend you didn't hear it, he'll get to be mayor one of these days, and a sad and sorry day that'll be for this town."

Ansel Woodruff owned a Cadillac dealership, Woodruff Realty, and a lumberyard, and some said he owned the church, the preacher, and the road to heaven. He was certainly the richest man in town, and it puzzled me a lot when Miss Alicia Small, our Sunday School teacher, told us that it would be easier for a camel to get through the eye of a needle than it would for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. As far as I could see, Ansel Woodruff was pretty close to having heaven on earth and a space reserved for him beyond the pearly gates.

Clara Woodruff was without any doubt, absolutely beyond question, the most beautiful woman in town. Probably in the entire state. Possibly in the whole country. She had heaps of shining auburn hair and greeny-blue eyes that changed color depending on whether she was happy or sad and dimples that made her smile an act of blessing and delight. There are people who claim that red-haired women can't be beautiful, that they tend to be freckled and scrawny and ill-tempered, but they never saw Clara Woodruff. Her skin was like vanilla ice cream, which was then and always has been my favorite flavor, and she was just a little bit on the plump side. Not fat, just rightly round in her pink shirtwaist dress with the belt cinched in tight around her tiny waist. I realize now that it sounds as if I had a crush on Clara Woodruff myself, and maybe I did. I know I desperately wanted to grow up to look like her.

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I *did* have freckles, lots of them, and still do. And I was skinny—knobby knees, sharp elbows, a neck like a stovepipe, and great big staring brown eyes made even bigger and more staring by the thick lenses of my eyeglasses. That's me to this very day. The whole thing seems to scare people away. Especially men.

But men clustered around Clara Woodruff. Especially my cousin Ben. Ben was twenty-three that summer, home from the Army with a few words of German and a taste for imported beer, which was hard to get in our town. My father used to tease him and say, "Good old Blue Ribbon isn't good enough for Ben. Guess I'll have to drink it all myself." And then they'd tussle and wrestle over the six-pack, rolling all over the backyard like a couple of kids. Ben lived next door to us with his widowed mother, who was my father's older sister. Aunt Eleanor was a lot older than my father, so that she seemed more like his mother and Ben like his kid brother. I think my father would have liked to have a son, but there was just me at the moment. My brother, who was named after cousin Ben, came along later, after the furor died down a bit.

I *know* I had a crush on my cousin Ben. Just looking at him made my stomach do flip-flops and I begged my mother to teach me how to make peanut-butter cookies because they were his favorites.

The first time he asked me to carry a note to Clara Woodruff, I didn't want to do it. I was out in the back yard in the ramshackle old summer house that had been slowly falling apart between our two houses for years, playing with my Elizabeth Taylor paper dolls and feeling hot and bored and grumpy. I wanted to go swimming in the creek, but there was no one to go with and I wasn't allowed to go by myself. When I saw Ben coming across his yard, I started to feel happy and thought I'd ask him to take me swimming. I was sure he'd say yes. But I never got to ask him. Instead, he asked me.

"Hi, kiddo. Would you be a doll and take this around to Mrs. Woodruff for me?" He had a sealed envelope in his hand.

I was sitting on the splintery floor of the summer house and I just stared down and picked splinters out of the floor.

"Hey! What's the matter, old chum?" He squatted down beside me and I could smell the good sweaty smell of him mixed with cigarette tobacco and hair oil. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the shiny top of the pack of Luckies he always carried in his shirt pocket.

"Cat got your tongue?"

"Nope," I said, but that was all I could say. My chest felt like it was being squeezed between two boards.

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"The only reason I'm asking you to do this errand for me is because you're my friend and I know I can trust you to do it right."

That made me feel a little better. Maybe if I took the letter for him, he'd take me swimming in the creek when I got back. I liked the idea of being his friend. I liked what he said about trusting me.

"I'd take it myself," he said, "except I have to drive Momma to the doctor. She's afraid to go by herself."

"Is she sick?" I asked. Sickness frightened me. There was a girl at school who came down with infantile paralysis. We all had to be examined and everyone was very nervous for a while.

"I don't think so. Just some aches and pains. But she wants me to hold her hand and whyever not. But I've got to get this message to Clara and I'd sure appreciate it if you'd help me out."

"Why don't you just call her on the telephone?"

You wouldn't think that a nine-year-old could be that disingenuous, would you? I knew perfectly well why he couldn't call her on the telephone. I knew it not as a fact, but instinctively. There was something fishy going on. And all of a sudden, I was overwhelmed with a rush of confused feelings—jealousy, curiosity, pride at being thought grown-up enough to be his confidential messenger, and a peculiar kind of competitiveness at the prospect of walking into the enemy camp. Clara Woodruff was the enemy. She was my rival. Crazy. I knew I would carry the message. But I had to make him convince me.

"I can't just call her up," he said. "You wouldn't understand."

Oh, wouldn't I? People are always underestimating kids. I got a little mad at him then. "What'll you give me?" I asked him.

"How about a quarter?"

I had to pretend to think about that. A quarter was what I got for my allowance. The Saturday-afternoon kiddy matinee cost fifteen cents. That left ten cents for candy. With another quarter I could buy the large-size box of Black Crows or Good & Plenties. Licorice candy was my favorite, although chocolate kisses came in a close second.

"Okay," I said.

He grinned all over his face and said, "Attagirl. I knew I could count on you."

He proceeded to give me detailed instructions about how I was to deliver the envelope and what to do if Clara Woodruff wasn't alone when I got there. "Go to the kitchen door," he said, "and look in. If she's in the kitchen, just poke your head in and give it to her. If you

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have to ring the doorbell, you better have some story ready in case someone else answers the door." He didn't say who that someone else might be.

"I could be taking orders for Girl Scout cookies. I am a Brownie, you know."

"Good idea! You're a smart kid."

He was smiling at me and I felt like a firefly lighting up just for him. He gave me the envelope and Clara's name was on it. When I turned it over, I saw he'd written S.W.A.K. on the sealed flap. I knew what that meant. Sealed with a kiss. It made me feel peculiar and I didn't want to see it, so I got up and stuffed the envelope into the back pocket of my shorts.

He bent over and kissed me on the forehead. "Thanks a lot, twerp. I'll see you later."

My hand was numb where he pressed the quarter into it, and then he was gone, running across the back yard. Aunt Eleanor was waiting for him by the garage door.

I went up the back stairs so my mother wouldn't see me and find something for me to do. I stuck my Brownie beanie on the back of my head just in case I met up with Mr. Woodruff or anybody else besides Clara up on Plumblossom Hill.

That summer my mother had taken to afternoon naps. Later I realized it was because she was pregnant. I felt stupid about that, but how could I have known? Nobody had told me. Anyway, she didn't see me come into the house and she didn't see me leave and set off up the street on the junior-size bicycle I'd got for my birthday and only learned to ride that spring.

The Woodruff house was one of those big old things with porches all over it and four fat columns holding up nothing on the front one. It took me about twenty minutes to get there, not because it was so far but because I had to go past the shopping center and I couldn't resist window-gazing at the hobby shop. My mother wouldn't believe me when I told her I wanted an H-O train-set with all the trimmings. She kept trying to get me interested in a collection of costume dolls from different countries—I think because she wanted them herself.

I was real sweaty when I finally pedaled up the hill and into the Woodruff driveway. Did I say it was hot that day? I believe it was the hottest day of the hottest summer we'd ever seen in that town. I could feel the sweat trickling down my scalp and the heat coming

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off my arms and chest. It made me a little shy of talking to Mrs. Clara Woodruff, who always looked so cool and powdery.

I parked my bike under the tulip tree in the back yard and tried to sneak up onto the back porch without making a sound. All the windows were closed, which seemed peculiar what with the heat and all. I peeked in one window and saw Mrs. Woodruff bent over, looking for something in the refrigerator. Biggest refrigerator I ever saw. I didn't see anybody else, so I rapped on the windowpane and waved when she straightened up and looked over at me. She smiled and waved back with her free hand. In the other hand, she was holding a frosty glass pitcher.

When she opened the door, I understood why all the windows were closed. It was like walking into a refrigerator and the reason why so many people went to the movies on summer nights. The place was air-conditioned. No wonder Mrs. Clara Woodruff always looked cool.

"Want some lemonade?" she asked, as if she'd been expecting me to show up at just that moment and was real pleased to see me.

"Sure thing," I said and drooped down onto one of the chrome and plastic chairs that were snugged up to the formica kitchen table.

"I've got some coconut macaroons around here someplace," she said, "if that house-ape ain't et them all up."

I watched her get out glasses and ice cubes and macaroons and a pretty green-glass plate, and from behind the tall round Quaker Oats box in the pantry cupboard a tall square bottle of gin. She brought everything over to the kitchen table except for the gin bottle, which she put back into the cupboard after she'd poured some into her glass.

"Here's to sin," she said, and raised her glass toward me.

I did what seemed natural and picked up my glass and held it out toward hers. The glasses clinked. I didn't know much about sin except what they said in Sunday School about the Ten Commandments and how if you didn't abide by them you were surely a sinner. I wondered if it was sinful to clink glasses to sin, but it only bothered me for about half a tick because she was pushing the plateful of coconut macaroons at me and if there's anything I loved better than licorice candy in those days, it was a good old chewy coconut macaroon. I took one and munched it and sipped my lemonade, which was both tart and sweet, and then munched another and almost forgot why I was there.

She reminded me.

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"You're Ben Somerville's little cousin, ain't you?"

I nodded and gulped down a sticky mouthful and said, "Yes, ma'am. And I got something for you." I fished the folded envelope out of my back pocket. It was wrinkled and bent into a curve because I'd been more or less sitting on it while I biked over. She snatched it from my hands and unfolded it, pressing it flat on the table before she opened it.

I watched her while she read it. It was just one piece of paper with writing that was on the large side, but she took her time reading it and sipping at her lemonade.

At last she put it down and said, "Wait here a minute."

I waited, but it was longer than a minute. I didn't mind, though, because I helped myself to another glass of lemonade and polished off all the macaroons but one, which I left on the green-glass plate to be polite, looking around that kitchen and wishing we had one half as nice. It was all pink and white, with ruffly curtains at the windows and something that must have been a dishwasher next to the sink. Mrs. Clara Woodruff certainly had a good life.

When she came back, her glass was empty and she was carrying a sealed pink envelope, with Ben's name written on the front. She filled her glass, half lemonade and half from the bottle in the cupboard, and sat down again.

"I'd appreciate it if you'd give this to your cousin," she said. There was a dollar bill peeking out from under the envelope she slid across the table.

"Sure thing." I got up to leave.

"Don't go yet," she said. "How old are you?"

"Nine and a quarter," I told her. "I'm tall for my age."

"Yes," she said. "I thought you were older. What's your name?"

"Jayne," I told her. "With a 'y.' I don't know why they spelled it that way. The other way's good enough for me. Maybe I'll change it when I'm grown up."

"That's sensible," she said. "Don't tell anybody you came here today."

"I won't," I promised.

All that month of July, I carried messages back and forth. Ben paid me in quarters and Mrs. Clara Woodruff paid me in dollar bills. Soon I'd have enough to get started on a basic train-set. But better than the money was the way Ben smiled at me whenever I brought him back one of those pink envelopes that smelled of carnations.

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When Ben went to work in the hardware store—which was near the hobby shop, with only the beauty parlor in between—I got in the habit of going by there once or twice a day. Most of the time, he had a message for me to deliver. After a while, he got to trusting me, so he stopped writing down and just told me what to tell Mrs. Clara Woodruff. It was usually, "Parking lot, five-thirty." Which is how I knew they were meeting there.

It was sometime in August that things changed. One night before supper, my father was reading the paper and he burst out laughing. "I see Ansel Woodruff has won a trip to Las Vegas. Anyone care to bet he won't be taking his ever-loving with him?"

"Hush, Paul," said my mother, flashing her eyes in my direction.

I pretended to be real interested in my library book, which was about building bridges—something I thought I might do when I grew up if I didn't get married.

But then she said, "Did you set the table yet, Jayne?"

So I had to go off to the back porch, where we ate in the summer to catch the cool breeze off the river. I tried to hear what they were whispering about in the front room, but it was too far from the back porch and the electric fan they had going was a noisy one.

Next day, when I biked up to the Woodruff house with the usual message from Ben, Mrs. Clara smiled and said, "Uh-uh. Not the parking lot. Not this time. You tell that handsome cousin of yours to hustle his bustle up here soon's he gets off work. If certain people can scoot off to Vegas with a certain cocktail waitress from the Hilltop Inn, certain other people can't be blamed for doing a little home-type entertaining, now, can they?"

"No, ma'am," I said, but I wasn't exactly sure what I was no-ma'aming her about. She was happy as a pig in mud and that was nice to see. It made her prettier than ever. And she was either too excited to write her message down or so full of it she had to let somebody else know about it—and that somebody just happened to be me.

What Ben and Clara didn't know, or maybe were too blinded with their own glow to see, was that practically everybody in town knew they'd been meeting on the sly and spending part of almost every evening in one of the motels that ringed the town. And what practically everybody knew, you can be sure Ansel Woodruff knew, too.

So why did he go off to Las Vegas with a lady friend?

The fact of the matter is that he didn't. Or at least not right away. Oh, sure, he got on the plane at the little airport just outside town,

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but that was just the connecting flight to the plane to Vegas. The way I figured it out was this: he had his lady friend wait for him at the big airport over in Indianapolis while he rented a car and drove back to town. That wouldn't have taken him more than three hours or so. No one would recognize the rented car, and his own sky-blue Cadillac was parked at our dinky little airport for all the world to see. What I can't understand is, if I could figure it out so easy—although I admit it didn't hit me until some years later—how come nobody back then got the drift of it?

But then, of course, nobody back then knew what I knew.

When I got back to the hardware store with Mrs. Clara's message for Ben, saying it just the way she said it to me, Ben started shaking his head and looking worried. "I don't know," he muttered. "I just plain don't know. It ain't right."

I didn't want to ask him what it was that wasn't right, so I just hung around, examining the flashlights and the assorted seed packets while he waited on customers and made up his mind. After a while, he said, "You don't mind going up there one more time, do you?"

"No," I said, and I didn't. It was kind of exciting being in the middle of all this grown-up carrying on, even though it seemed a little bit silly, all this hooroar over who met who and where and when.

This time, though, instead of telling me the message, he went back to writing it down—and it took him a long time and a lot of pieces of paper to get it the way he wanted it.

"There," he said at last. "I hope she understands. I just can't go up there. It wouldn't be right."

Well, off I went again, figuring in my head that I'd only need a couple of dollars more to get the basic H-O train-set, although I'd have to come up with a pretty good story for my parents about how I got the money. I thought about saying I found it, although the most money I ever found was a quarter underneath the swings in the playground at Echo Lake Park.

Back up at the Woodruff house, I noticed there was a strange car in the double garage next to Mrs. Clara's little red Triumph. It wasn't Mr. Woodruff's sky-blue Caddy—it was more like a green Chevrolet, and the only reason I knew that was because it looked just like ours, only newer. But I didn't think anything of it except

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that maybe Mrs. Clara had a visitor and I'd have to be careful about slipping her the note.

I tiptoed up on the back porch and looked in the window like I always did. Mrs. Clara was sitting at the kitchen table, drinking lemonade and smoking a cigarette. There didn't seem to be anybody with her, so I tapped at the window. She looked up, and when she saw me she shook her head and mouthed some words, but the window was closed and I couldn't hear what she was saying. I took Ben's envelope out of my pocket and waved it at her.

She put her finger to her lips as if to tell me to be quiet—when I hadn't made any noise at all except for that one little tap at the window. I'd never known her to act so peculiar, and come to notice, her eyes were all red and bleary and she seemed awful downhearted, which was a big change in the weather from the way she'd been a couple of hours earlier. I calculated that there was somebody in the house with her. Maybe her mother-in-law had come to visit and was giving her a hard time. That would account for the strange car in the garage. It didn't dawn on me at the moment that there was only one person and one subject that could make Mrs. Clara so unhappy.

While I stood at the window, still hoping she'd invite me in for a glass of lemonade, she took off her shoes, which were just little pink ballerina slippers, and came over and raised the window a few inches.

"Give me that," she whispered.

I stuck the envelope through the open window.

"Now get out of sight and wait." She slid the window closed and went back to the table and sat down.

I went off to one side of the porch where I could duck behind the glider and still get a good view into the kitchen. Mrs. Clara didn't open the envelope right away, but she sat real still and lit another cigarette. She seemed to be listening for something. I watched her smoke that whole cigarette and finish off her lemonade, and then go and refill the glass from the pitcher in the refrigerator and the bottle behind the Quaker Oats box. I was getting pretty thirsty myself and wondered if I ought to wait any longer if there wasn't going to be any message going back.

Finally, she shrugged her shoulders, lit another cigarette, and opened the envelope which all that time she'd been holding in her hand. I watched her read the note and it seemed to me she was relieved more than anything else. She looked toward the window but I don't think she could see me. She must have felt me looking

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in at her though, because she kissed the note and waved it at the window as if to say, "Okay. Goodbye. See you another time."

I was just about to jump down off the porch and get on my bike when I saw somebody come into the kitchen. I stopped dead and ducked down behind the glider with only the top of my head and my eyes sticking up over the back of the seat. Mr. Ansel Woodruff stood over his wife and held out his hand. He was saying something and his face looked stormy, but I couldn't hear a word of it. Mrs. Clara kept her hands together, pressed against her chest, which I forgot to mention was practically naked. She was wearing nothing but a skimpy little halter and a pair of short shorts. She tried to stuff the note inside the halter but Mr. Woodruff grabbed the note away from her and read it. She sat in the chair glowering up at him and yapping away a mile a minute until he slapped her back and forth across the face. Then *he* started yapping and his face got as red as a firecracker. He smacked her around a bit more until she started crying and pointing toward the window. I took that as my cue to get out of there, but when I stood up my foot had gone to sleep and I fell and landed in a heap on the porch floor. When I got up, Mr. Woodruff was staring down at me.

"Get inside," he said, and I did. I didn't relish the idea of him slapping me around the way he'd done Mrs. Clara.

He shoved me down into a chair across the table from Mrs. Clara and locked the kitchen door so I couldn't get out. She was crying real loud and blowing her nose into a paper napkin. "You stay right there," he said to me and went off into another part of the house.

"I'm sorry," Mrs. Clara whimpered, "but he was beating me up."

"I know," I told her. "I saw him."

"He's a bully," she said. "I hate him."

"Why don't you get a divorce?" I asked her, feeling very sophisticated and grown-up even mentioning the word.

"Oh, I couldn't do that," she said, and she really seemed shocked. "People just don't."

"Some people do."

"Well, yes. But, see, he buys me anything I want, and Ben ain't got nothing but a job in a hardware store, and anyway I'm going to have a baby. Oh, you're just a kid—I don't know why I'm telling you all this."

She put her head down on her arms and cried some more, and I thought, if this is what being grown-up is like I guess I'll skip it.

Mr. Ansel Woodruff came back into the kitchen with a sheet of

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that pink letter paper and an envelope. He shoved them on the table in front of Mrs. Clara and said, "Write."

"I won't," she said, and took another swig of her lemonade.

Mr. Woodruff knocked the glass out of her hand and it went flying across the room and smashed against the big refrigerator.

"Now look what you done, you big ape!" Mrs. Clara wailed.

"Write!" he bellowed.

"I don't have nothing to say!"

"I'll tell you what to write."

"I got no pen."

"Be my guest," he said, and fished one out of his inside jacket pocket. Did I say he was wearing a green-and-yellow-plaid sport jacket and a pair of poison-green trousers and a yellow shirt? Put me in mind of a yellow-bellied, slimy, slithery snake.

So on it went, back and forth between them, with him telling her what to do and her trying to wriggle out of it. Until at last she caved in and screamed, "All right, all right, all right! Have it your way!"

He stood over her, with his big fat hand on her bare shoulder as if he owned her, which I guess he did, and told her what to write. She wrote it down with sharp stabbing strokes of the pen that like to tore the paper into shreds.

"I don't want to see you no more, ever," Mr. Woodruff dictated. "This is the end. You are just a kid and stupid to boot. My husband is a real man and knows more about pleasuring a woman than you'll ever figure out in a million years. So don't be sending that ugly little kid up here with no more notes. You ought to be ashamed of yourself for what you done. I sure am. I hope God forgives us both, but I don't think He ever will. Goodbye forever. Get lost."

She got it all down, dropping tears like a waterfall onto the paper. I didn't like it too much myself, especially the part about "that ugly little kid." I knew I was no beauty, but I didn't think I was that bad. I guess I hated Mr. Ansel Woodruff. He truly was a skunk, just like my father said.

He picked the note up off the table and stuffed it into the envelope. Mrs. Clara collapsed in a heap, all red-faced and watery, with her lipstick smeared up to her nose and her black mascara running down to meet it. I have to admit I felt pretty scornful of her at that minute. She should have been brave and refused to write the note no matter what. I know it's hard when you're being swatted around by a big, overstuffed bully, but if you love someone you just don't do things

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that will hurt him. And that note would just plain knock the stuffing out of my cousin Ben.

Mr. Woodruff licked the flap of the envelope and sealed it. His red tongue put me in mind of one of those red rubber-tire patches like my father had to put on my inner tube the time I rode over an old board full of rusty nails when I was learning to ride my bike.

I was real pleased when Mrs. Clara rared back in her chair and shouted, "He'll never believe I wrote that mess! Besides, Jaynie here will tell him what you done!"

"One way or the other, I don't care," said Mr. Woodruff. "He'll get the message. He'll think you're nothing but a dumb little tramp who got cold feet. He won't want to have nothing more to do with you."

I began to see the rightness of his side of the story. After all, even a skunk like Mr. Woodruff doesn't deserve to have his wife fooling around with a handsome young man like my cousin Ben. And if Ben stopped fooling around with Mrs. Clara, he'd have more time to go swimming with me and maybe even take me for rides in the car, on picnics and fishing and such. But then Mrs. Clara said something that sent my hopes tumbling.

"Supposing I run off with him? Don't think he didn't ask me to."

"You do that," said Mr. Woodruff, meaner than anything he'd said up till then. "You do that and I'll hunt you both down."

He stuck his hand into the side pocket of that snaky green-and-yellow jacket and pulled out a shiny silverish gun. "I'll hunt you down and I'll blow your stupid head off. His, too. Think about it."

Mrs. Clara stared at the gun and turned an awful ashy color, except for around her eyes which stayed red and bruised-looking. I remember to this very day the way the sunlight streaming through the fluffy pink curtains twinkled on the barrel of that gun and sent flashes into my eyes. I felt real sick like I might have to throw up into the puddle of lemonade that was oozing toward my feet.

Then Mr. Woodruff hiked up his shoulders, put the gun on the table, and said, "Okay." Mrs. Clara put her head down on her arms on the table right next to the gun. Her beautiful red hair spread out over her arms, but it looked like all the life had gone out of it. He handed me the note and said, "Make sure he gets it. And if I ever catch you around here again, I'll beat your backside black and blue, something your old man should've done the minute you took up messing in things that don't concern you. Now, get."

I pedaled the fastest ever back to the hardware store, where I

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found Ben busy selling garden hose to the undertaker's wife who couldn't make up her mind how much she wanted and how much she could afford to pay for it. Ben told me to wait a minute, so I sat down on the top step of a little stepladder and tried to catch my breath and figure out exactly what I should tell him. Should I tell him about the gun? I didn't think Mr. Woodruff would really shoot Mrs. Clara, but you never could tell. I sure didn't want anything awful to happen to Ben. I decided I'd just give him the note and see what he had to say.

When he finally came back from carrying the garden hose out to the undertaker's wife's car and there was nobody else in the store except for a high-school boy sweeping up in the back, he opened up another stepladder and sat down next to me. It was almost closing time.

I took the note out of the back pocket of my jeans and handed it to him without saying a word. He opened it and read it and jumped up off the stepladder. "Goddam," he said, but soft and low and scary as if he meant to do something crazy. "Goddam. He's back. He never went. It was all a trick."

He took hold of me by the shoulders and almost lifted me off the stepladder. "Tell me what happened," he said, tight-lipped and whispering. "Everything. Don't leave anything out." His dark eyes glinted like hard marbles and I was really getting scared.

So I told him everything. Even the part about the broken lemonade glass. And then I said, "Maybe we could go swimming for a little bit before supper."

But he said, "You go on home, Jaynie. I'm sorry I got you involved in this. Now I just got to straighten it all out. I love that woman and I can't let her suffer on account of me. Go on home."

And before I could say anything else, he was out of the store and running across the parking lot toward his mother's old Ford, which was all the car he had to use. I ran after him, but he peeled out of the parking lot before I got anywheres near the car. He must not have heard me yelling after him. I forgot to tell him the part about the gun.

Tired as I was, I got back on my bike and headed back toward Plumblossom Hill. I couldn't just go on home like he told me to. I couldn't not know what was going to happen next.

When I got there, there was Aunt Eleanor's car angled into the curb with the front door hanging open. I got off my bike and closed

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the door so nobody would come by and sideswipe it right off its hinges, and then I wheeled my bike around to the back real quiet. I could hear voices inside the house, even with all the windows closed, but I couldn't make out a word of it. When the explosion came, I like to jumped out of my skin. I knew it was a gunshot right off. Couldn't have been anything else.

I dropped my bike where it was, its front wheel up in the air and spinning, and ran for the back porch. When I looked in the window, I saw what I never hoped to see. Mrs. Clara was lying on the floor, sort of slumped up against the refrigerator. There was blood all over the white refrigerator door. Ben was standing across the room, looking stupefied, with that shiny gun in his hand. There was no sign of Mr. Woodruff. While I stared in the window, feeling hot and cold and numb and scratchy all at the same time, I saw Ben lift the gun, put it next to his head, and pull the trigger. Nothing happened. I tried to scream but I couldn't. Then I really did have to lean over the porch railing and throw up into the rhododendrons.

So that, more or less, is why I don't drink lemonade. To this very day. Or eat coconut macaroons. Maybe it's why I never got married or even had a boy friend, but that's a question I haven't looked at too closely. Ben's gone now. A long time gone. Not dead, but gone from town. He left as soon as all the fuss was over. That made me feel real sad, but I realized it was better for him than sticking around where everybody and his shadow knew the whole story and took sides and would never forget. I did hope and pray he'd take me with him after what I did for him, but he wouldn't and couldn't and that was that.

What I did for him was this. After I got through heaving into the rhododendrons, I went back to the kitchen window and rapped on it, making sure not to look toward the refrigerator. Ben heard me and like to jumped out of his skin. He looked awful, sort of gray and wild-eyed. I was afraid he was going to do something stupid, which he'd already tried to do and failed.

He waved me away with that gun in his hand, but then he noticed what he was holding and dropped it like a hot potato. He rushed over to the kitchen door and flung it open.

"Get out of here, Jaynie—just get on out of here! I thought I told you to go home."

"Well, I didn't, and here I am. *You* better get your*self* on out of here," I said.

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"No," he said, "I can't do that. I can't just leave her here like this, with no one to care for her."

"Well, where's that yellow-bellied snake?" I asked him. I couldn't bring myself to speak Ansel Woodruff's name.

"I don't know. He said he was going to call the police. He said it wouldn't matter if I stayed or left, they'd soon catch up with me."

"Well, did you or didn't you?" I asked.

"Did I or didn't I what?"

I couldn't believe he was being so dumb, but I guess he was in what they call a state of shock. "Shoot her," I said.

"Who, me?" he said. "Of course not. Why would I do a thing like that?"

At that moment, I heard a car starting up in the driveway. I ran out on the back porch just in time to see the nose of the green Chevy disappearing behind the bushes as it backed out of the garage.

"He's gone," I said, going back into the kitchen. "Now what are you going to do?"

"Just wait here, I guess. The police should be here soon. I've just got to be sure she's safely taken care of."

I guess he realized how that sounded, because he slumped down on a kitchen chair and the tears started rolling down his face. I felt a lot like crying myself. "If you won't go, you won't," I said. "But I'm staying here with you."

He didn't answer, so I sat myself down on the other side of the kitchen table with my back to the refrigerator and waited with him until we heard an ambulance and the police came hurrying into the house—three of them. I knew them all by face but not by name. They knew who we were.

Ben said nary a word to their questions. Seemed like he'd lost the power of speech. But I told them everything I knew and one of them wrote things down in a little black notebook.

They arrested Ben, of course. They found Mrs. Clara's last note in his shirt pocket along with his Lucky Strikes and took both away from him. They told me to get on home. When I rode away on my bike, two men were lifting Mrs. Clara, covered over with a sheet, into the ambulance.

But I didn't stay home. No matter what anybody said—my mother, my father, Aunt Eleanor, the lawyers, and the police—I was determined to say my say.

When they finally caught up with Mr. Ansel Woodruff in Las Vegas and told him the news, the word was he like to had a heart

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attack. He came back to town a broken man, the lying polecat. In the newspaper photograph of him getting off the plane, he's wearing a plain dark suit and sunglasses and he's stooped over like an old man.

Ben continued not saying a word in his own defense. I suspect he didn't want to tarnish the name of Mrs. Clara, which, as far as I could see, was already pretty rusty. So it was up to me. And since it was pretty obvious to me, if not to anybody else, that Mr. Ansel Woodruff was going to lie his fat head off, I saw no reason why I shouldn't help the truth along as much as I could.

I told everyone who would listen to me, and a few who didn't want to, that I was standing at that kitchen window and saw Ansel Woodruff shoot Mrs. Clara in the head. I told all the rest of it, too. How he'd slapped her around and made her write that note to Ben when she didn't want to, and so forth and so on.

He kept saying he wasn't anywheres near the house that day, being a couple of thousand miles away in Las Vegas. He kept on saying he had no notion that Ben and Clara had been carrying on right under his nose, but I don't think anybody believed that.

The upshot of the whole thing was that nobody went to jail for killing poor Mrs. Clara. A lot of people around town started saying she got what she deserved. A few folks took Ben's side, but most of them rallied round the yellow-bellied snake. In my opinion, most folks don't have much sense.

Ben didn't seem to care one way or the other. He stayed in his house after they let him out of jail, never drank beer with my father, and never spoke word one to me. One day, he just wasn't there any more and no one knew where he went, not even Aunt Eleanor. I always thought it would have been nice if he'd hung around at least until I grew up. He might have started talking to me again and, who knows, maybe he would have come to like me a little bit.

Mr. Ansel Woodruff mended pretty fast in the days that followed. He got him a brand new canary-yellow Caddy and married again within the year. He's mayor of the town now, has been for some few years, and since I work in the County Clerk's office I see him most every day. And every time I see him, just to let him know what I think, I say, "Good morning, Ladykiller." Or good afternoon, as the case may be. He smiles and pretends I'm talking about his manly attraction for the ladies of our town. But he remembers what I saw and what I said I saw. He knows exactly what I mean, and I'll never let him forget it. It's the least I can do.

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a *NEW* Main Street story by

HENRY T. PARRY

The narrator of the previous story told of a crime she witnessed in her hometown when she was nine years old. Hugh, the narrator of this story, set back in the Twenties, is a thirteen-year-old small-town boy some of you will know from stories about him in earlier issues. After what Hugh discovers here, we wonder if he *will lose* his *taste for lemonade . . .*

NO OBSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE

by HENRY T. PARRY

I deliver the morning papers for Charley McCall. I was hanging around his newsstore one afternoon, just staring out the window and half listening to Charley complain to Ghosty Lambert how taxes had gone out of sight, when I saw a man and a woman get off the 4:30 trolley from Weston and walk across the square past the Civil War statue and go into the Colonial Hotel. He was wearing white-flannel pants with stripes, a Palm Beach coat, and a hard straw hat with a red band, and she had on kind of a frilly dress, red shoes, a big hat that slanted down in front of her face, and carried a parasol and a big straw handbag. Even if they hadn't looked rich you'd know they were because it cost three dollars a night to stay at the Colonial and that didn't include meals.

Just then Charley happened to look out of the store window. Charley never takes his eyes off the square for more than thirty seconds at a time unless he thinks somebody's standing too close to the cash drawer.

"Well, well, well," he said in that falling voice he uses when he's

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being sarcastic, which is pretty often. "I see Mr. Connie Coleman, the patent-medicine king, has come back to his hometown to give us the benefit of his thinking." He went on in the same tone: "But who's that with him? It ain't your sister Allie, is it, Ghosty? The one who's supposed to have run away with Connie five or six years ago?"

What Charley was saying didn't ring a bell with me because five years ago I was eight years old. I don't know if it rang a bell with Ghosty because when I turned around, Ghosty was gone. I heard the back screen-door slam behind him. But nobody could ever figure out why Ghosty did or didn't do anything.

"Even before he went off to the war, you couldn't figure Ghosty out," I heard Charley say once. "Sometimes you think he's crazy and sometimes you think he's the smartest man in town. You know, he never came home until three years after the war was over. But ever since he told me about that hospital he was in, I can understand why Ghosty ain't had more than one oar in the water at the same time."

Maybe so, but I noticed that Charley used Ghosty around the store from time to time and Charley's brother Ed had him working part-time at his feed-and-grain place. Neither Charley nor Ed did such things out of the goodness of their hearts.

"Hugh," Charley said to me. "Would you watch the place for a couple of minutes? And put your glasses on so's you can see to give the right change."

I was in the store alone when this Connie Coleman came in. The lady wasn't with him. He was still all dressed up, something you'd notice in our town, because at five o'clock in the afternoon most of the men you see on the street are still in their overalls. His hair looked too shiny for a man of his age, a glossy brown—the same color as his big moustache. His collar was as starchy and white as if it was Sunday and his tie looked like it was genuine silk.

He stood just inside the door and looked around, shaking his head slowly as if he was wondering what anyone would be doing in a hole in the wall like Charley's. He came up to me and held out his hand and smiled. You saw that his teeth were long and yellow, narrow at the top near the gums and getting wider toward the bottom so that they looked like a row of bony yellow triangles.

"I'm glad to meet you, my friend," he said. "What's your name? Or better yet, what's your father's name?"

"My name is Hugh Lewis. My father is Henry Lewis."

"Of course. Of course. I should have known, just looking at you.

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Two fine-looking men. Henry and his son Hugh. Your father and your mother Mary are well, I trust? Best lawyer in the county, Henry."

There was something about the way he spoke to you that flattered you and made you feel important that such a prominent man was glad to see you and was dealing with you as if you were both the same. I knew he wasn't running for office and he knew I couldn't vote. I learned later that at one time he'd been just a plain, ordinary fellow around town who'd gone out in the world and become rich by selling Seacreet-O, which he made from a secret formula. It was supposed to be good for rheumatism.

"I should like a cigar, if you please, Hugh. I don't suppose any of the city papers are left?"

There was one *North American* left and I tried to smooth it out some because I'd been reading it, but he didn't seem to notice. I held out a box of cigars for him to choose from and instead of spending time trying to pick one out, he took the whole box. It was the first time I ever *saw* anybody buy a whole box and even Charley never sold a complete box except just before election. Connie Coleman took a big roll of bills out of his pocket and plumped a ten down on the counter the way other people might push a dime across. He was rich, all right, just like Charley said. There wasn't much going on in our town that Charley didn't find out about sooner or later. And it was Seacreet-O that made him rich, Charley said.

Not only did Charley find out things about Connie Coleman but he learned things about Mrs. Coleman, too. Mrs. Coleman, it seemed, had been one of Connie Coleman's best salespeople. Charley would mumble behind his hand that she was able to tell ladies that Seacreet-O was good for a lot of things that only they knew about. No wonder, Charley said. If you read the label, you'd see that in every twelve-ounce bottle there was nearly three ounces of alcohol.

When Connie Coleman showed up one day with a brand-new five-passenger Hupmobile touring, Charley knew within twenty-four hours that the car they'd been using had broken down in Weston and they'd immediately bought a new car and paid cash on the barrelhead. But not even Charley knew how Ghosty had gotten himself a part-time job driving for the Colemans.

"It ain't that Connie can't drive," Charley would tell everybody, "because when he lived here he used to drive the laundry truck. It's that he wants to show off to the hometown folks." Charley may have

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been right, because Connie Coleman didn't do much all day but sit in the square and talk to folks and spend his nights at the Wapiti Club, which is a fraternal organization which Charley says isn't fraternal at all until after the third drink. I noticed, though, that every time Connie dropped by the store and asked Charley if he wanted to go over to the club, Charley never said no.

Mrs. Coleman spent a lot of time having Ghosty drive her around the country so she could look at birds with her binoculars. You would never think to look at her that she would be interested in birds. The folks in our town, being like they were, didn't believe she was looking at birds. The trouble was, they couldn't figure out what she was looking at.

Mrs. Coleman seemed to be interested in wildflowers, too. Early one morning I was delivering my last paper, the one to old Aunt Kate Ferris out on the Ridge Road. Aunt Kate lived alone in the last house, a mile or more beyond my next-to-last customer, which was Tucky Lohman's roadhouse. That meant I had to walk over a mile out and over a mile back just to deliver one paper.

Mrs. Coleman was standing in the road holding a flower and looking it up in her wildflower book.

"Oh, good morning!" she greeted me. "Lovely morning, isn't it? You're the young man who works at the newsstore, aren't you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Coleman."

"I'm not Mrs. Coleman. I'm Frances Bowen." She pronounced it Frawnces. "Of course everyone thinks I'm Mrs. Coleman."

That was one bit of information not even Charley McCall knew. I was going to learn there was a lot Charley didn't know.

"Your birds are wonderful. And so are your wildflowers. Do you know what this one is? It's growing everywhere along the road."

When I was a kid, Dad had taken my older sister Beth and me on a lot of wildflower walks. I told her it was a day lily.

"Well, good for you. What's your name? What form are you in?"

I told her my name and asked: "What's a form?"

"I forgot. You say grade, don't you? I'm English. In England we say form."

That explained why she talked funny. But she *was* interested in wildflowers, which somehow didn't seem to go with the way she was dressed, all chorus-girly like. I told her how spring was the best time for wildflowers and how in June the mountain laurel burst out everywhere and in August the fields would be white with Queen Anne's lace. I guess I was showing off how much I knew, which Beth says

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I do all the time, but Frances Bowen seemed interested. She told me how back in England she used to press wildflowers and later make sketches of them.

We were talking away when Ghosty drove up to take her back to town. He saw I had one paper undelivered and asked whose it was. I told him Aunt Kate Ferris's.

"Jump in. We'll drive you out there and then take you back to town. Save you a long walk."

"Oh, splendid," Frances Bowen said. "Perhaps we'll spot some birds. There's one very small one—Well, never mind. Let's get in, Hugh."

I thought it was unusual for Ghosty to offer me a ride without asking Frances Bowen if it was all right. Ghosty wasn't the kind of person to take advantage. Frances Bowen and I climbed into the Hupmobile—it had that good new-car smell—and we went out to Aunt Kate's. We found her sitting on her little porch with a mess of stringbeans in her apron lap. I carried the paper up to her instead of sticking it in the mailbox on the fence.

"Now, Hugh," she said. "You won't forget to come out tonight and water the tomatoes. It ain't rained since I don't know when and I'm feeling too poorly to do it myself. Come just after sunset."

What Aunt Kate was talking about was a patch of tomatoes she had planted. Every few days I'd water them with water from an old well that hadn't been used in years, located at the edge of the woods at the back of the tomato patch. The reason she wanted me to water them at sundown was that otherwise the water would evaporate too fast. It wasn't easy to do because you had to haul every drop. First you lowered a bucket on a rope into the well, then you heisted it out and poured a tin can full on each plant. Aunt Kate had offered to pay me for doing it and I admit I was willing to take it, but Dad said if ever I took money for helping someone out he would stop my allowance for so long that Confederate money would be good before he restarted it.

I got back into the car and Ghosty got out, saying he wanted to say good morning to Aunt Kate. Frances Bowen and I sat in the car and waited while he stood with one foot on the porch steps and talked to the old lady. I wondered if he was telling her about his new job, driving Connie Coleman and Frances Bowen around. When he came back, he said something that surprised me. (He wasn't talking to me—it was more as if he was explaining something to Frances Bowen.)

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"I grew up in that house. Aunt Kate—everybody calls her Aunt Kate but she is really my aunt—she and Uncle John took me and my sister Allie in when we were little. I lived here until I finished high school and went away to the Army. They were both very kind to Allie and me."

"I didn't know you had a sister, Ghosty," I said.

Ghosty didn't answer, just kept looking at the road. I felt he was uncomfortable because he'd talked about himself. Or maybe it was because of Frances Bowen being there. Nobody talked for so long that finally Frances Bowen broke the spell by asking me about some flower along the road.

I didn't think too much about Ghosty's reaction because I was used to him. Charley said Ghosty didn't always look at things the way other people did. Charley would then go on to say how it was because of the war and Ghosty being at that hospital.

"Charley," I said when they had dropped me at the store, "Ghosty mentioned his sister Allie when the three of us were at Aunt Kate's this morning."

"He talked about Allie, did he? Now don't that beat everything? Here he is with that fancy lady he hardly knows and he talks about Allie. And us folks that's known him all his life—and Allie, too—he never says anything to about her. What'd he say?"

I thought Charley was awful eager for gossip, even for him, so I told him Ghosty hadn't really said anything—just clammed up.

"That's what he always does whenever anybody mentions her. Well, I'll tell you. Allie—her right name's Alice—is Ghosty's younger sister. While Ghosty was away at the war, it seems Allie just up and left town. Nobody saw her go. She was, oh, twenty, twenty-one. At first everybody thought she had gotten a job down at Weston in war work, but after a while folks began putting two and two together."

"What do you mean?"

"At the same time that Allie left, Connie Coleman took off, too. Everybody thought they'd gone off together."

"Do you think they did?"

"Well." Charley put on that voice he uses when he wants you to think that what he's saying is other folks' opinions and not his own, but he doesn't fool anybody. "Well, you saw Connie Coleman and that lady come to town the other day. Connie's rich now, ain't he? How did he get rich? From Seacreet-O. Where did he get Seacreet-O? Seacreet-O ain't nothing but Aunt Kate and Uncle John Ferris's tonic. They used to make up this drink and sell it to anyone who

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wanted to come out to the Ridge Road and pick up a jar. They kept the receipt a secret, figured people would like it better if they didn't know what was in it. Now ask yourself how Connie got the receipt. By cozying up to Allie Lambert, that's how."

"But didn't she ever write home or anything?"

"No. The weeks went by and when the Ferrises didn't hear from her, they went to the police. The police located Connie down in the city. He said he hadn't seen her since he left town, that she was just some girl he had been friendly with back in his hometown but that was all. I hear he wrote a letter to Aunt Kate—Uncle John had died in the meantime—saying how sorry he was to hear about Allie. I tell you, that Connie Coleman is—" He stopped. "Anyway, Allie became just another missing person."

"Did he really cozy up to Allie?"

"He sure did. Folks used to see them together, not where you'd usually expect to see a man and a girl together, like at Ben's soda fountain or a John Bonney movie or down at Treetop Park, but kind of hole and corner—late at night out on the Ridge Road, or in Connie's Ford runabout parked outside Tucky Lohman's roadhouse. Connie was up to something. Everybody who knew him said that. All you had to do was look at the difference in their ages. Aunt Kate and Uncle John Ferris knew it was their tonic receipt Connie wanted, not Allie, but it didn't do any good to talk to her."

I asked Charley how he knew all this.

"Because John Ferris told me. I used to go out there to see him when he got sick. John and me were second cousins—" Charley pulled back. "Look, maybe you ain't got nothing better to do than hang around here and ask me questions, but I do. Beat it."

So I beat it, but I couldn't help thinking how things turn out. Here's this Connie Coleman coming back to his hometown, rich because of a receipt for a drink they said he wormed out of Ghosty's sister. And here's Ghosty, with nothing to call his own, not even, if you listened to some folks, his right mind. I didn't think losing out on the receipt for what became Seacreet-O would have bothered Ghosty any. But for his sister to disappear must have had something to do with the way Ghosty was.

After supper that evening, I went out to Aunt Kate's place and knocked on the flydoor. She was sitting in her parlor at the piano, playing hymns, but having trouble getting from beginning to end. She asked me to come in and set a while before watering the to-

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matoes. She tottered off to the kitchen and brought back a plate of cookies and some lemonade.

"I know you just et, Hugh, but at your age I guess you can manage. Too bad, you just missed Ghosty and that lady he drives around."

She went back to her piano, riffled through the pages of the hymn book, and poked at the keys with her brown-spotted hands.

"Hugh, whyn't you turn the pages for me?"

I got up, put on my glasses, and stood beside her as she played. When she nodded, I would turn the page.

On the piano were two pictures. One was of Ghosty in his Army uniform with the high coat collar, floppy brimmed hat that went to a point at the top, and puttees. The other picture was of a pretty young girl, dressed in an old-fashioned way, with a long skirt that had a belt with a big buckle, high laced shoes, and a shirt with wide stripes and a little gold watch pinned to it just below her left shoulder. Her hair was dark and set like a ring around her head. I know that everybody says it about a picture they like, but in this picture it really did look as if she was going to say something to you. Something you would both laugh at. Written on the picture was: To Aunt Kate and Uncle John, with love, Allie. June 1918.

"Hugh," Aunt Kate said after a while, pushing herself up from the piano stool, "whyn't you get started with the watering. It'll be dark soon. I got to put some bread to rise."

I got the bucket, rope, and tin can and went down across the road to the garden patch. It was long and narrow, running back to the woods at the far end where the old well was and where there was the foundation of a barn that had been gone for so long that trees were growing inside the stone walls. A little path came out of the woods and ran past the well and in front of where the barn had been.

I dropped the bucket into the well, yanked it around some to fill it, and pulled it up. I went along the rows, putting a can of water on each plant. It was slow work and the mosquitoes were getting busy. I almost wished I had never learned to count because then I wouldn't know how many plants there were left to do. I was bending over to pull up what must have been my fourth bucket of water when my glasses slipped off and fell into the well. This pair was only two weeks old and I knew I'd catch it if I came home and said I'd already lost them. There was nothing for it but to see if I couldn't climb down and feel around until I found them. I knew the water

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wasn't deep and neither was the well, come to that—maybe only ten or twelve feet from the ground down to the surface of the water.

I tied one end of the rope to a sapling and let myself down over the edge of the well. The stones on the side were rough and uneven, with lots of places where you could stick your feet between them. By feeling ahead with your feet you could let yourself down on the rope. It wasn't too hard because if your foot slipped out of a crack you could always save yourself with the rope.

I got down to the level of the water without too much trouble. Then I braced myself across the well, feet on one side, shoulders on the other, and held onto the rope with one hand. With the other hand, I raked back and forth across the bottom. Even though the water wasn't very deep because of the drought, I could barely reach it. But I was lucky on my first pass. I snagged my glasses, along with whatever stuff was hanging on them, shoved them down under my shirt, and began to work my way back to the top. My head was about two feet from the rim when I heard footsteps coming along the path. The footsteps stopped and I heard voices from near the foundation wall of the barn.

"Let me go over it again. I'm going to drive you back to town now. As soon as you possibly can, have Connie drive you out to Tucky Lohman's for dinner. Have him park as far from the restaurant as possible. Just as you're about to walk into the restaurant, ask him to go back to the car for your handbag. Remember, don't *you* go near the car once you've left it."

It was Ghosty Lambert talking. I had heard his voice plenty of times at Charley's but it sounded different now. It wasn't so unsure or absent-sounding but more as if he had made up his mind about something. The voice that answered was Frances Bowen's.

"I want to get it over with," she said with her British accent. "I can't stand him any longer. It's taken me a *year* to get him to come back to his hometown!"

"I know. I want us to be together again, too."

"I feel like a spy," she said. "Like the tied goat they use as bait for the tiger."

"After tonight we'll both be free. I won't have to be the village idiot one day and the general handyman the next."

They were quiet for a minute. My arms were aching and I didn't know how long I'd be able to hang on to the rope.

"I'm sorry it's taken such a long time," Ghosty said. "We've sacrificed years when we could have been together."

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"But what kind of years would they have been? You wouldn't have been able to settle down and live a normal life until you did—what you're going to do."

"You don't *know* what I'm going to do. And you never will."

"When you think back," she said, "isn't it amazing how happy we were in all that horror at the hospital?"

"Love happens in the strangest places. A psychiatric hospital in England. Me an American medical orderly, you an English nurse. It scares me to think I could have been in the infantry instead of the medics."

They moved on along the path, still talking, not six feet away from me. I hung onto the rope because I didn't want them to know I'd overheard them. After I heard a car engine start—they must have parked it out of sight farther up the road—I climbed out of the well and fumbled under my shirt for my glasses. I cleaned them off on my shirt and found something hooked onto the earpiece, a circular case of metal with its insides rusted together. I knew what it was. I had seen it that same evening in the picture on Aunt Kate's piano. It was a gold watch like the one Allie wore pinned to her blouse. I rubbed it on my shirt and in the fading light I could see engraved on the back the initials *A.L.*

Allie Lambert hadn't run away with Connie Coleman.

I ran down to the road and up to Aunt Kate's. She was sitting by the oil lamp, reading the paper. When I handed her the watch, she held it under the lamp to examine it and then began to rub it between her palms as though she was trying to bring some warmth and life back to it. I told her where I'd found it, but didn't say anything about what I'd overheard. I'll say this for Aunt Kate—she may have been old and shaky but she didn't get upset. She sat up straight, looking at the window where the moths were beginning to bat themselves against the screen.

"We knew she never ran off with Coleman," she said. "He came around here like he was courting Allie, even though he was almost twice as old as she was. But we noticed he only started paying attention to her after John wouldn't sell him the receipt for our drink. John kept the receipt in a tin box upstairs. When Allie didn't come home that night, we looked in her room and found her clothes were gone. I looked in the tin box and the receipt was gone too. And the next day we heard that Coleman was gone. Everybody said Allie and Coleman had run off together. But Coleman wanted that receipt. He didn't want Allie."

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"How did the watch get into the well?"

"Coleman killed her and put her there. John and I were certain he had done something awful to Allie. But we couldn't prove it."

When she said that, her face, which was dark-skinned, grew still and lost its expression, and her hands stopped rubbing back and forth over Allie's watch. Her dark eyes looked at the blackness that was settling outside the window, not moving, not blinking, making me think she looked like an Indian who has been captured by an enemy tribe. I felt that in her mind a sentence had been passed on Connie Coleman.

When Aunt Kate said what she thought had happened to Allie, the words I'd overheard at the well took on a different meaning, like when you shake one of those kaleidoscope things and new patterns stand out.

"Aunt Kate, where's your phone? I got to call Dad right away. Or maybe the police."

"Why, Hugh, we wouldn't give a telephone house room. John always said with a party line everybody would know our business."

Tucky Lohman's place was on the road between Aunt Kate's and town. Since I couldn't get Dad, or Tommy Hayes, our chief of police, the next best thing was for me to run to Tucky's and warn Connie Coleman that something was going to happen. If there was time. I'd have to tell Dad and the police later.

I took off as fast as I could, but I couldn't keep up the pace for long. I got a stitch in my side that felt like I was being stuck with a knife. I kept telling myself I'd have to let it hurt me some other time, to pretend it was happening to somebody else. I had to keep pounding away to get to that restaurant before Coleman and Frances Bowen did.

It was completely dark by the time I got to Tucky's. Connie Coleman's Hupmobile was parked under a light at the far end of the lot next to a tall privet hedge. I saw Frances Bowen standing on the steps of the restaurant, looking across the lot as if she was waiting for someone. Connie was just closing the car door, a lady's handbag under his arm.

I ran toward him and was two cars away when I tripped over two green wires that ran from under Coleman's car, under the two cars next to it, and through the privet hedge. I lay there on the macadam and heard a voice from the other side of the hedge.

"Coleman, look down. There are two green wires. They are con-

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nected to four sticks of dynamite under your car. I am holding one wire in my left hand, the other in my right. When I touch the two ends together, the dynamite goes off."

Coleman whirled around, his arms spread out, his hands pressed to the side of the car. Frances Bowen's handbag spilled open at his feet.

"On the back seat," the voice went on, "there's a notebook. It's open to a page where your confession to the murder of Allie Lambert is written. Sign it and throw it over the hedge."

Coleman didn't move. His mouth was open and I could see those long yellow teeth, as if he was a wolf making his last stand. Slowly he turned his head and looked into the back seat.

"Sign it and take your chances in court. Don't sign it and I put the two wires together."

I knew I should yell and tell Ghosty I was there, only two cars away from four sticks of dynamite. He was probably dug into some place where the blast wouldn't reach him. But I couldn't. I had seen that picture of the young girl on the piano. I had found her watch in the well. I couldn't prove anything any more than Aunt Kate or Ghosty could. I remembered out of nowhere a legal phrase I had heard Dad use. Obstruction of justice. If I yelled now, maybe I would be preventing justice from being done in the case of Allie Lambert. Not courthouse justice, but Ghosty and Frances Bowen kind of justice. Aunt Kate kind of justice, where a grim satisfaction would be part of it in spite of the cookies and lemonade and her old, brown-spotted hands playing hymns on the piano. I could have called out, but I didn't. Then I thought of something I could do. But I didn't do that, either.

"I'm going to count to three, Coleman. One—"

Coleman dropped his arms to his sides and rubbed his palms up and down on those white-flannel pants. He looked quickly to either side as if looking for a way out, but there was nothing he could do. Ghosty was probably holding those wires about an inch apart, and before anybody could come to Coleman's help Ghosty would touch them together. He would, too. I knew he would because he always seemed to live by some inside rules of his own. He had planned this for too long. He had been separated from Frances Bowen for years, just to get the man who had murdered his sister.

"Two—"

Insects were swirling around the light overhead and the bats were flitting through and disappearing into the dark. The only sound was

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the hot bugs, giving out with that rising whir. If I was going to do anything, it had to be now.

Without turning around, Coleman groped on the back seat and found the notebook. He took out a pen, signed, and tossed the notebook over the hedge. He leaped into the car and when he pulled away from the parking place I saw the bundle of yellow sticks of dynamite that had been lying under the car.

Nobody in town saw Ghosty and Frances Bowen after that night, after they turned in Coleman's confession. Somebody said they had been seen down at Weston, getting on the train for the city. When Tommy Hayes, our chief of police, examined the well, he found what he expected to find.

Connie Coleman's getaway didn't do him much good because the state police picked him up three days later and he signed another confession.

"Why didn't you yell?" Dad said when I told him and Mom what I'd seen in the parking lot at Tucky's. "Why didn't you run? Wasn't there anything you could have done?"

"Yes, there was," I said. "I had my pocket knife open and I had one of those green wires in my hand. It was thin and I could have cut it easy."

"Well, why didn't you? You could have been blown to pieces."

I said it loud. It sounded pretty weak but as I said it a curtain of stubbornness seemed to come down in front of my eyes, making me feel as if I was looking out at them from behind a waterfall.

"Because it would have been an obstruction of justice," I said.

They looked at me as if I was crazy, but they didn't say anything. Then they just looked at each other.

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A WOMAN FOR ALL SEASONS

by GEOFFREY SHIRES

January: A bitter month. More than a touch of frost. Is my husband's love growing cold?

February: Thawing. In floods of tears I ask, does he love me still?

March: "You're two-timing me," I bluster. He storms out.

April: Showers and sunshine. A fickle month. I meet B.

May: "In the Spring a young man's fancy—" I think B. fancies me.

June: A summer of roses and wine. B. and I dine in style—and secrecy.

July: Sultry heat. Four weeks of smoldering passion.

August: The conventional holiday month. An unconventional holiday with B.

September: The days are shortening. Time is running out. I won't always be young.

October: "How well I know what I mean to do when the long dark autumn evenings come."

November: "No dawn—no dusk—no proper time of day." No divorce!

December: "The year is dying—let him die." Let *him* die!

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a *NEW* Jonas Pickett story by

MICHAEL GILBERT

Black Bob was Farmer Maggs' most valued possession. He was one of the smaller, lighter, Southdown strain, but was still a formidable hunk of muscle and aggression, moving over the grass with the ponderous certainty of a Sherman tank. . . .

BLACK BOB

by MICHAEL GILBERT

The moon was throwing a cold clear light over the field, called the Top Field, because it was the most northerly of the seven which made up Maggs Farm and stood a little higher than the other six.

Under the hedge bordering the top of the field something was moving, slipping in and out of the shadows. It might have been an animal, but when it appeared for a moment in the full moonlight, it could be seen to be a boy.

Tommo was a young tearabout who lived with his mother in a farmhouse two miles up the road. She had long given up any attempt to control him, and her neighbors all prophesied that he would come to a bad end. What he was doing at three o'clock on that particular morning was setting snares for rabbits. They holed up under the bank among the roots of the thorn bushes and would start coming out at first light. Tommo reckoned to pick up three or four. Later in the day he would offer them for sale to their rightful owner, Farmer Maggs.

He was not the only occupant of the Top Field.

A dark cloud was drifting along the upper edge of the pasture; moving, stopping, and moving on again. This was Black Bob, Farmer Maggs' most valued possession. He was a splendid animal, not

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grossly over-bred like some of the bulls which won rosettes at the Smithfield Show. ("Can't hardly carry their own weight," said Maggs. "They have to wheel 'em up to the cows on a trolley.") Black Bob was one of the smaller, lighter, Southdown strain, but was still a formidable hunk of muscle and aggression, moving over the grass with the ponderous certainty of a Sherman tank.

Tommo watched him without fear. Black Bob would never charge into a thorn hedge, and if he did make any such move Tommo could wriggle through the close-growing roots as easily as the rabbits he was trapping.

Black Bob knew he was there, a trespasser in his private kingdom. But he knew that he was unassailable. He gave a brief snort to mark his feelings and moved off down the field.

Tommo had scooped out a little hole in the dust at the foot of the bank. He was a great deal more comfortable there than he would have been in the sordid heap of rags in his mother's back kitchen. As soon as it was light, he would see what luck his snares had brought him and would move down with his catch toward the farmhouse. He liked to wait until Maggs had left on his morning round, when he could deal with Mrs. Maggs, who was more generous and less suspicious than her husband.

On this particular morning he had not long to wait. He saw Maggs come out, surprisingly not dressed for farm work, but wearing a dark suit and carrying a bulging leather case. Tommo was not to know it, but Maggs was on his way to Shackleton to call on his solicitor, Jonas Pickett. It was a visit which was to have consequences for all of them.

"Well, Mr. Maggs," said Jonas, "it's not a simple question. Not by any means."

The contents of the leather case were spread on his desk. Some of them were modern documents, neatly typed and bundled together with tape. Others were huge old-fashioned deeds, handwritten on parchment.

"When I bought the farm," said Maggs, "the lawyer from Hoole, old Michelmore, he was the one who looked after our family business, but he's dead now, he said, 'No need to keep any deeds that's more than thirty years old, you can use them for lampshades if you like.' But Mrs. Maggs, she wouldn't hear of it."

"I'm glad of that," said Jonas. "I think it's a crime to destroy old deeds."

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"That's what Mr. Westall said. You'd know the man I mean? He said, tear them up and you're tearing up the history of the County. I let him have the old deeds to look at. Truth to say, he kept them so long I thought he'd forgotten all about them, but when he came back he was in a real taking, I can tell you."

Jonas knew of Mr. Westall, although he had never met him. He was one of two acknowledged local antiquarians. He had written a treatise on historic and prehistoric Shackleton. Jonas had borrowed it from the Vicar and found it a curious work, being partly based on genuine research among the local archives and partly designed as an attack on the theories of his rival in this particular field, Professor Templeman from Sussex University.

"When he brought the deeds back, he had a big book with him—some sort of local history."

"*Clayborne's History of West Sussex?*" suggested Jonas. "I've got a copy here." He fetched down the fat red-and-gold book from the bookshelf.

"That's the one," said Maggs. "That's the very book. He read me some things out of it, all about King Henry the Eighth, it was. From what he told me, he wasn't the sort of joker we learnt about at school."

"Bluff King Hal? He was a lecher and a bully."

"That's right. And it wasn't just his nine wives. I expect they got no more than they deserved. It was what he did to all those monasteries. Did you know there used to be one a few miles north of here? You'll not see one stone standing on another now."

Jonas had found the place in the book. He read out, "In 1520, the Bernadine Cistercian Abbey of Fyneshade was visited by the King's Commissioners. The Abbot, Robert Beaufrere, had been warned of their coming and their arrival had caused all the ornaments to be removed from the chapel and the Abbey building and buried. They had been replaced by common artefacts of wood and iron."

"That's right," said Maggs. "That's what he told me. The King had the Abbot and his—what was he called?—"

"His sacristan."

"Right. He had the pair of them taken up to London and put in the Tower, and they tried to make them tell them where all these treasures had been put. But no matter what they did to them, and they really worked them over, they couldn't make them talk."

"That's right. They both died under torture rather than tell where the Abbey treasure was hidden. The Abbot was a strong man. There's

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a lot about him here." Jonas was turning the pages of Claybourne. "We don't know much about the sacristan. All we're told is that his name was Legrand."

"Ah," said Maggs. "But that was the point. That's what old Westall was going on about. It's what he'd found in my deeds. They don't go right back to those times, of course, but it seems that one deed tells you what was in an earlier one. You'd understand about that, sir."

"Recitals, yes. Go on."

"Well, it seems the farm belonged since way back to a family called Lengard, and he made out that this was really the same as Legrand. It was just that people weren't so fussy about spelling in those days."

"It's a possible variation," said Jonas. He was beginning to see what Mr. Westall was getting excited about. "And your farm's not far from the site of the Abbey."

"Little more'n a mile across the fields."

"And if the farmer, in 1520, was a relative of the sacristan, his farm would be the logical place for them to bury the Abbey treasure. Yes, I see. It's plausible. And Mr. Westall wants to wander over your property with a metal detector and see if he can turn anything up."

"That's right sir. First thing I thought was, why not? Won't do no harm. He'd have to be a bit careful in the Top Field. I've kept Black Bob on there ever since he upset that picnic party. Well, you know about that."

It had been the first occasion on which Maggs had consulted him. A family with little knowledge of country ways had thought they could share one of the lower fields with the bull. Luckily, they had got out over the fence unhurt and Black Bob had contented himself with trampling on a transistor and other belongings they had scattered around, and had finished by sitting down on their picnic basket. They had wanted compensation. Jonas had told Maggs to ignore them. "They were trespassers. They've got no rights. They won't sue you."

This had proved to be an accurate prediction.

"Howsomever," said Maggs, "my wife wasn't so sure about this metal detector. She said, 'You go and have a word with Mr. Pickett. He was right about the picnickers. He'll tell you what to do.' "

"Well," said Jonas, "as I said, it's not a simple question." He referred to some notes his partner, Sabrina Mountjoy, had made for him. He referred all difficult legal points to her and very rarely found her wrong. "Things are classed by the law as treasure trove

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if they were obviously hidden with the object of recovering them later, *if* the owner can't now be traced, and *if* they turn out to be gold or silver."

"Not much doubt, is there? This'd be treasure trove all right, or most of it."

"Quite so. And that's where the snag comes in. If they *are* treasure trove, they belong to the finder. It's only if they *aren't* treasure trove that they belong to the owner of the land."

Maggs said, "Ah," and then, "Oh." His mind was moving over the new possibilities. "So if they turned out to be diamonds or rubies or such, they wouldn't be treasure trove, so I'd get them. But if, what's more likely, they were gold and silver old man Westall would collar the lot."

"Right."

"Then what I do is I tell Mr. Westall, you keep off. And I get myself one of those metal-detector things and look for the stuff myself."

"How big is your farm?"

"Five hundred acres, just under."

"You realize that it'll take you about a year to cover it all properly."

"I'm in no hurry," said Mr. Maggs.

But Mr. Westall was in a hurry.

The following morning, a telephone call to Jonas was followed by the arrival of Jack Merriman, junior partner in the firm of Porter and Merriman. Jonas had played golf against him and had concluded that if his law was as erratic as his putting, he could be a dangerous adviser.

Jonas said, "I don't think you've met my partner, Miss Mountjoy. I believe that you want to discuss the law of Treasure Trove, so I thought I'd have her in on it. She knows much more about it than I do."

Merriman smiled politely and plunged straight into business. He said, "I gather you advised Maggs not to let Mr. Westall have access to his farm."

"I told Mr. Maggs that if any searching was to be done, it might be better for him to do it himself."

"I expect you know that using a metal detector is quite a skilled job. Mr. Westall has considerable experience in that field. He'd be

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much more likely to find the Abbey treasures—always supposing they are there to be found."

"And when he found them?" said Jonas drily.

"He would be quite willing to sign an agreement that any reward paid by the Museum would go to Maggs."

"Yes. I thought about that," said Jonas. "But I gather there could be some difficulty in policing such an agreement."

"Overton," murmured Mrs. Mountjoy.

"Quite so. I expect you remember the Overtons Farms Case. The finder handed over some of the items he had unearthed, but pocketed the really valuable ones."

"I hope you're not suggesting—" began Merriman.

"I'm not suggesting anything," said Jonas. "I'm sure that Mr. Westall's interest is antiquarian and historical. I was simply pointing out that no paper agreement can ever be entirely water-tight. My real point, however, was much simpler. The land belongs to Mr. Maggs. If he doesn't want Mr. Westall on it, he's entitled to say so."

"I'm not sure about that," said Merriman, in the manner of someone about to produce a trump card. "Basically, all treasure trove belongs to the Crown. I take it you'd agree with that."

"Agreed," said Jonas cautiously. "The finder gets a reward equal to their value."

"And if there is reason to believe that treasure can be found in a certain place, then every effort should be made to recover it."

"That may be so."

"And to prevent treasure being unearthed is regarded by the law as a ground for the prosecution of the owner of the land."

Mrs. Mountjoy bestirred herself. She was a large woman and possessed a deep and authoritative voice. She said, "I take it, Mr. Merriman, that you are referring to the offense known as Concealment of Treasure Trove."

"Precisely."

"It was abolished in 1968. See Section 32 (i) (a) of the Theft Act of that year."

"Oh?" said Mr. Merriman rather blankly.

Another putt missed, thought Jonas. When Mr. Merriman had taken himself off, he said, "Good work, Sabrina. That finished him. I suppose you weren't pulling his leg."

"Certainly not. He would have known it himself if he'd kept up to date with his law . . ."

But Mr. Westall was far from finished. He turned to the press.

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The editor of the *South Down News* had already published several learned articles from Mr. Westall's pen, some of them rather hard going for his readers. The one he received the following week was more to his taste. "Good stuff," he said to his sub-editor. "Should start something."

"There is apparently," wrote Mr. Westall, *"a legal right to act the part of the dog in the manger. Although I cannot claim to have proved it conclusively, I have established a strong possibililty that a number of priceless artefacts of gold and silver, probably adorned with precious and semi-precious stones, lie buried in a defined area north of the town of Shackleton. Yet the owner of the property has seen fit to refuse to allow even a simple preliminary examination which would confirm or refute this theory. Apparently the law supports him—"*

There followed several paragraphs dealing with the history of Fyneshade Abbey and comparing the stupidity of the law with the unselfish zeal of your true antiquarian. Jonas had just put down the newspaper when the telephone rang. It was Mr. Maggs. He had read it, too.

"My wife says I ought to sue him for libel."

"Don't think of it," said Jonas. "It's probably what he wants. If no one takes any notice, it's a damp squib."

However, someone did take notice. The next number of the *South Down News* contained a letter from Professor Templeman of Sussex University. It was written with a practiced pen, dripping acid.

"I was fascinated," it said, *"to read the effusion in your last week's issue from our soi-disant antiquarian expert, Mr. Westall. He spoke, with bated breath, of artefacts of gold and silver adorned, if we are to believe him, with precious stones! What Mr. Westall appears to have overlooked is that Fyneshade Abbey was a Cistercian Foundation under the rule of St. Bernard. As even schoolboys know, that rule permitted the use, as ornament, of nothing but iron. I fear the treasures must be dismissed as a figment of Mr. Westall's over-heated imagination. There is, however, another angle to it. King Henry the Eighth's Commissioners, unlike Mr. Westall, would not have been ignorant of such elementary facts. They would have realized that the riches of a prosperous, long-established community like Fyneshade would have been in the form either of currency or gold and silver in bar form."*

"And that really will stir people up," said the editor.

It certainly stirred Mr. Westall, who rang up his solicitor.

"On the whole, I should advise against an action for libel," said

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young Mr. Merriman regretfully. "Fair comment on a matter of public interest, and all that sort of thing."

"It's not fair comment," said Mr. Westall. "It's outrageously unfair. However, if you say so—"

The ripples did not stop there. The national press began to show interest. Antique ornaments might not evoke great public concern. Bullion was another matter. Jonas had a word with the friendly Superintendent Queen. He said, "I expect you saw what was in last week's *South Down News* about the Abbey treasure."

"It's in the *Express* and the *Mirror* this morning," said Queen. He sounded unhappy.

"I imagine that every amateur treasure seeker in the country will be queuing up to have a look for it."

"And a lot of not-so-amateur villains," said the Superintendent. "I've made arrangements to have a car doing regular patrols. That's all right by day, but it's a long perimeter to watch by night."

"Treasure hunting by night wouldn't be easy," Jonas warned. "It's not a quick job."

"Let's hope we don't have any trouble," said Queen. "We've got enough on our plate already."

Two days later, at ten o'clock in the morning, when Jonas had just settled down to deal with his mail, his secretary announced a visitor. It was Doctor Makepeace. Jonas knew Dan Makepeace and liked him. He was Coroner for the district, one of the new type, qualified in law as well as medicine. He said, "Since you're acting for Mr. Maggs, you won't be surprised that I'm calling on you."

"Delighted, certainly—surprised, too. I wasn't aware that my client had been killed, or had killed anyone."

"As a solicitor," said Dr. Makepeace, "you ought to know better than to say a thing like that. Do you suppose that Coroners are only interested in dead bodies?"

"A slip of the tongue," said Jonas. "I suppose it's the treasure."

"Certainly. Historically, it's the duty of the Coroner to look after all the interests of the Monarch. Buried treasure—"

"Of course. And stranded whales."

"We don't get many of them. But treasure, that's something else altogether. It'll be my duty to keep a close watch on how things develop."

"You *and* the police. Excuse me." His telephone had rung. He picked up the receiver and said, "I'm busy. I can't deal with it now."

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Then, with a change of tone, "Oh, I see. Yes. Yes, of course. As a matter of fact, Dr. Makepeace is with me. I'll tell him." He replaced the receiver slowly and said, "That was your officer. You'd better put on your other hat. There's a dead body in Maggs' Top Field."

"Dead by violence?"

"Yes," said Jonas. He sounded upset. "It's a clear case of murder, and the murderer is known. Black Bob caught an intruder in the Maggs' Top Field last night and—dealt with him. Rather thoroughly. Maggs would like me to be there to look after his interests. Your officer is on his way up there."

"My car's outside," said Dr. Makepeace. "We'll go together."

By the time they got there, the police photographers had done their work and the body had been removed to one of Maggs' barns and laid on a trestle table under a tarpaulin. The Coroner's officer, a stolid ex-policeman, indicated it to the Coroner, but seemed disinclined to approach the table himself. When the Coroner had lifted the tarpaulin, Jonas understood why, and went outside to regain control. A superficial glance at what was lying on the table suggested that Black Bob had stamped or jumped with sharp hooves several times on the body, and once at least on the face.

Dr. Makepeace said, "We shall have to rely on the clothing for identification." Chief Superintendent Whaley, who was there with Detective Superintendent Queen, nodded his agreement. He, too, seemed unwilling to make any closer inspection. He said, "We've telephoned the pathologist from Portsmouth. As soon as he gives the word, we'll have—that—taken down to the mortuary. When we have his report, we may be able to get somewhere. And you—what's your name?—Tommo. Don't go too far away. We'll need a statement from you."

Jonas saw that a boy was trying to efface himself in a corner of the barn. Maggs said, "My wife'll look after him, Superintendent. He'll be handier here than at his home. You can telephone us when you want him."

"All right," said Whaley, "I'm getting back to the station. And, Alec, I think you'd better stay here for the time being."

Superintendent Queen nodded. He said, "Leave me two men. When this news gets about, we'll have a job keeping people out of the Top Field."

"Keep them out of my farm altogether," said Maggs. He sounded angry.

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As the crowd started to disperse, Jonas said to Maggs, "If you've got Tommo's story, I'd better hear it as soon as possible."

"My wife got most of it from the boy before the police arrived. If that Superintendent frightens him, he won't get nothing out of him at all. He'll just clam up. We'll walk up to the field."

When they got to the Top Field, there was a policeman guarding the gate but the field itself was empty.

"I moved Black Bob down to one of the barns," said Maggs. "I daren't let anyone else handle him. He was in a wicked mood. Not that you can blame him, really, with his hide full of shotgun pellets."

"He'd been shot?"

"Shot at. Better start at the beginning. Young Tommo was under the top hedge. Sleeping out, he says. Rabbiting, I don't doubt, though he won't admit it. It must have been between three and four in the morning. Not starting to get light, but not too far off it, when he heard a car stopping in the road—a big car, by the sound of it. Maybe a van. He didn't see it. He heard people getting out and the door slamming, and about ten minutes later—and I can tell you he was surprised—he saw three men coming into the field."

"You mean they'd got through that hedge?"

"*And* the wire fence. But there's more to it than that. Come and have a look."

They walked across.

When the local authorities had widened the road at this point, they had not only compensated Maggs handsomely for the land they had taken, they had built him a fence of stout diamond wire mesh along the new verge. This ran outside the old thorn hedge, itself a formidable barrier.

"Professional work," said Jonas.

The intruders had cut a neat square in the fence, folding back the flap, and had then carved their way through the thick roots and branches of the old thorn hedge to make a sort of tunnel.

"They wouldn't have done that in a hurry," said Jonas.

"Have another look," said Maggs.

When Jonas got down on his knees at the opening of the tunnel he saw what Maggs meant. He said, "They were opening up a tunnel that had been made before. I can see the old cuts. All they had to do this time was to chop away stuff that had grown since they were here on the previous occasion. How long ago would you think?"

Maggs examined the cut ends and the shoots which had grown

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since. He said, "Thorn's not a quick grower. Not like elder. I'd say two years, maybe less."

"It looks as though they knew that all they had to do was cut the fence and a little hedging."

"They may have known about fences and hedges. They didn't understand my black prince. They knew he was there, right enough. That's why they brought a gun. They thought they could scare him off. So when he moved over to have a look at them, they loosed off. I'd guess when the pellets hit him, he just went mad. Tommo didn't care much for talking about the next bit, but the end of it was one man badly hurt—a broken arm, it sounded like—and another man helping him. They got away because Bob was attending to the third man who was lying on the ground."

"And the others just left him there, and drove off."

"That's what Tommo says. He was scared blue. He slid off home, but his mum saw there was something wrong and got the story out of him and sent him back to tell us. We rang up the police."

Jonas said, "As far as you're concerned, of course, there's nothing to worry about. They were trespassers, worse than trespassers—they broke into your property armed."

"I thought I was probably in the clear," said Maggs, but he sounded relieved. "It didn't seem to me that they were ordinary treasure hunters. To start with, they didn't have one of those metal detectors you were talking about."

"You're sure of that?"

"Certain sure. When Bob got them, the only idea they had was to get clear. Anything they were carrying they dropped it. When I came up this morning, I found a pick and a spade and—I don't know what you'd call it—a long rod it was, measured off in feet and inches. The police took them all away."

Jonas thought about it, and the more he thought the odder it seemed.

He said, "It looks as though they not only *knew* the treasure was there, but had been told where to dig—maybe by the people who cut the original hole in the hedge."

"It certainly looks like it," said Maggs.

"You clear off." This was to a young man in a trenchcoat who had crawled through the gap in the hedge.

"Be a sport," said the young man. "Give us a story for the *South Down News*. We're ahead of the London boys for once."

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"I haven't got no story for you," said Maggs. "And if you don't clear out, you'll find yourself in trouble, I can tell you that."

The policeman was already advancing across the field. As the young man removed himself reluctantly back through the tunnel, two more cars drew up on the road outside. One had a notice *Press* on the windscreen. The other had a blue light on top.

"Dead heat," said Jonas. "We'd better be getting back to the house before they start pestering Mrs. Maggs."

The editor of the *South Down News* said to his faithful staff of two, "It's *our* story, and the way I'd like to run it is this. Do some research in the libraries. Portsmouth and Brighton will be best. They've got sections dealing with local history. And have a word with Mr. Westall. He'll be keen to help. I believe that the Abbot, Robert Beaufrere, was a well known man. I don't mean that he was popular—rather the contrary, from what I've been able to find out. But a *strong* man."

"You think it's his spirit is still protecting the treasure? His curse will be on anyone who tries to disturb it? That sort of thing?"

"Lovely," said the editor. "Work it up."

"I don't understand it," said Superintendent Whaley, "and I don't like it."

"It's odd whichever way you look at it," agreed Superintendent Queen. "If these people had been normal treasure hunters they'd have brought the proper equipment with them. They didn't need to because I'd guess that someone *already* used a detector and located the site. They knew they wouldn't be allowed to lift the stuff, so they came back at night to dig it out."

Whaley said, "It's possible, but it's got snags to it. If someone had already been over the ground with one of these detectors and had located the treasure, how did he keep clear of that bull when he was doing it?"

"Maybe it was that young Tommo. He seems to know how to dodge in and out."

"He's a slippery customer," agreed Whaley. "But I don't somehow see him as a treasure hunter, do you? And there's another difficulty. If he was hunting for it, how'd he know it was in that field? There are half a dozen other fields in Maggs Farm. All that old Westall ever proved—if you can call it proof—was that it could have been in one of them."

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"There's another odd thing, too," said Queen. "The pathologist is still working on the body, what's left of it. But we've got a preliminary report on the clothes. You saw it?"

Whaley nodded. "Nothing in the pockets. An expensive suit, but all tailor's tabs cut out. No laundry marks." The two men looked at each other. The same thought was in both their minds.

"They were professionals," said Whaley, "and ten to one they came from London. As soon as we've got the prints, we send them up to Central to see if they're on record. Then maybe we can see where we're going. All we can do meanwhile is keep people off the farm and hope the thing dies down."

"The press are bound to splash it."

"Shackleton used to be a nice quiet place," said Whaley. "A bit of healthy noise in July and August with the summer visitors and the fun-fair on the Lammas, but nothing to get upset about. But ever since that fellow arrived from London it seems to have been one thing after another."

"Jonas Pickett, you mean? You don't think he's behind this?"

The Chief Superintendent considered the possibility and shook his head. He would like to have blamed Jonas, but could see no way of doing it.

"I don't see how we can tie him into it," he said regretfully.

The headline, in the largest type available to the printer of the *South Down News*, said BLACK BOB LIVES. *"Robert Beaufrere, the formidable Abbot of Fyneshade, the man who defied King Henry the Eighth and died in the Tower of London rather than give up the treasures of his Abbey to that despoiler of the monasteries, was known throughout the countryside as Black Bob. Can it be a coincidence that when modern vandals threatened to lay hands on the silver and gold and precious stones to preserve which he suffered on the rack a modern Black Bob should step into his place and mete out justice to the robbers?"*

Inserted here were photographs of Farmer Maggs leading his bull round the ring at the Lewes Show and an engraved portrait of Abbot Beaufrere. Both looked tough characters.

"Good stuff," said the editor, "but have we any proof that the country people called the Abbot Black Bob? It seems a bit disrespectful."

"Not actually," said the assistant, "but it will be very difficult for anyone to prove that they didn't."

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Superintendent Whaley read the article, but paid less attention to it than he might have done on account of a telephone call which he had just had from Scotland Yard.

It came from a Chief Superintendent Morrissey, who was known to him by name as head of the London District Regional Crime Squads, picked men who dealt with serious and violent crime in the Metropolitan area.

He said, "Those dabs you sent us off the man the bull trod on. They belong to a chap called Darkie Haines. He's got a record as long as your arm. Everything from Gross Bodily Harm downwards. A very dangerous character."

"He met a more dangerous character that night," said Whaley.

"Yes. I saw a copy of the pathologist's report. Your animal did a thorough job. Pity he didn't get a chance to stamp on the other two as well. Now this is only a guess, but Haines normally operates with Lefty Summers and Mick Gavigan. They're both hangers-on of Catlin's mob. *And Lefty's in hospital with a broken arm.*"

Whaley said, "It seems to add up, doesn't it?"

"It adds up," said Morrissey. "I'm not sure if I like the answer or not, but I'll send down my number two, Jock Anderson, to have a word with you. And the farmer. He could be useful if he'd agree to play along."

"Before he'll do anything," said Whaley sourly, "he'll want to talk to his solicitor—"

"Why not?" said Morissey. "They're not all crooks."

"A chap called Pickett. Used to practice up in London."

"You mean old Jonas Pickett?"

"You know him?"

"We had one or two encounters in the line of business," said Morrissey. "He always played straight down the fairway as far as I was concerned."

"If your people know him," said Whaley, "it may make things a bit easier."

Jock Anderson turned out to be a young-looking, pleasant-mannered Scotsman.

He found Mr. and Mrs. Maggs having tea, and joined them at the table. After doing justice to Mrs. Maggs' scones with Southdown butter, jam and cream on them, he said, "I would imagine you've had a bit of contact with the Press lately?"

"Contact! I'll say I've had contact! It's got so I can't hardly poke

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my nose outside the farm but they're yammering round asking for what they call a statement. Promising me money for it. One of 'em, from a London paper he was, he got into the house through the scullery window. I gave him a statement with the thick end of my walking stick."

"They're a pest," agreed Anderson. "But I wondered if there might be one of them you could talk to. Maybe the lad from the local paper. He wouldn't be so uppity as the others."

"Young Richards," said Maggs thoughtfully. "He's not so brash as the ones from London. I expect I could talk to him. But what's the point of it? I haven't got nothing new to tell him."

"That's just it," said Anderson. "I could suggest something he'd be glad to print. Let me explain what I've got in mind."

"It seems daft to me," said Maggs. He had driven down to talk to Jonas.

"Let me get this straight," said Jonas. "He wants you to let it out to the local press—preferably accidental like—that you're so fed up with all this fuss that you've decided the only way to stop it is either to find the Abbey treasure or prove it isn't there."

"Right."

"And the way you're going to do this is to tell Mr. Westall that you've changed your mind. He and his friends can start prospecting right away."

"Not right away. He was very particular about that. It's Wednesday today. I was to let him start as early as he liked *on Monday morning,* and then go on until he'd covered the whole farm."

"Not until Monday. I see." A glimmering of what was in Jock Anderson's devious mind was beginning to dawn on Jonas. He said, "I suppose that's one way of settling the matter. I'm told he's an expert with this particular apparatus. If he brings a party of fellow enthusiasts with him they ought to be able to cover the area quite quickly. Of course, we'd have to get him to sign up the sort of agreement he was talking about before he started."

"It's not that part of it I mind so much. It's the other bit."

"Let me guess," said Jonas. "You're to let it be known that after, shall we say, Saturday night, the police will no longer be guarding the farm."

"That's right. And I hope it makes more sense to you than what it does to me. What he suggested was that I'd had an argument with the police about paying for their help. They'd wanted to charge me

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five pounds an hour for having a policeman on duty. And time and a half for the weekend. So I said, if that's the way you feel you can take 'em away, I'm quite capable of looking after my own fields."

"Plausible," said Jonas, his admiration for Jock Anderson increasing. "And I take it you were to tell the reporter that this was strictly confidential, and not for general publication."

"That's right. But you know how it is. People get talking."

"I know just how it is. I admit it seems an odd thing to do, but I've got a feeling that if you cooperate it would be very helpful."

"Helpful to who?"

"To you *and* the police."

"Well," said Maggs, with a grin which exposed some ill-cared-for teeth, "if you say so. You've always advised me right up to now. But I'd like you to be handy, just over the weekend, in case I need you in a hurry."

"My dear Mr. Maggs," said Jonas, "I wouldn't miss it for the world. I'll be available in my office, or my flat, from Saturday morning onwards."

Saturday passed peacefully. It was seven o'clock on Sunday evening when Jonas's telephone rang. It was Mr. Maggs. He sounded more excited than worried. He said, "Could you come along, Mr. Pickett? I'm sure I don't know what's going to happen, but I'd like you to be here when it does happen."

"I'll drive right up," said Jonas.

"Not right up. Arrangements are you leave your car in Joe English's yard. That's about half a mile down the byroad west of my place."

"I know it," said Jonas. "What then?"

"Then you walk. But not along the road. There's a track that goes through the woods and comes out near my house. Joe'll show you."

It was dusk by the time Jonas reached Maggs' place. The approach route had been carefully chosen. It ran for the most part through woodland and the lie of the land hid it from observation. Maggs had the door open and whisked him inside as soon as he arrived.

He and Mrs. Maggs seemed to be alone in the house.

"I saw five cars in Joe's yard," he said. "Where are the men?"

"They've moved off to take up their positions," said Maggs. "All afternoon they've been coming in by twos and threes. They've got searchlights with them. And rifles. They're expecting trouble, no question."

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Mrs. Maggs said, "I liked that young Scottie. Very well spoken, he was. You'll take a bite of supper, Mr. Pickett, I expect?"

"That would be splendid," said Jonas. "I guess we've a long night ahead of us."

"Better comfortable in front of a nice fire," said Maggs, "than squatting in a damp ditch."

It was two o'clock by the illuminated dial on Jock Anderson's watch when the cars arrived. They stopped a long way short of the field, but he was listening for them, and he heard them. Then there was half an hour of silence. "Playing it cautiously," he said to the sergeant, who was in the ditch beside him, "afraid there may be a trap, but think they can spring it."

The sergeant grunted. He suspected he was catching a cold and was glad that the moment for action had arrived. "Pass the word round to take up positions, but no lights until I give the signal."

There were five men, and they came across the field in a purposeful bunch, the two on the flanks carrying shotguns. Two had spades and one a measuring line. There was enough light for the watchers to see them at work. A line was laid down from one of the gateposts in the inner fence and the digging started.

It was easy going, because it was clear that the earth at that particular spot had already been disturbed. After twenty minutes' spadework a halt was called and one of the men got into the shallow excavation and stooped to lift what was in it. A second man got in beside him to help.

Six boxes had been unearthed and laid on the grass when the lights came on from two corners of the field. "There are fifteen men here," said Anderson. He had rejected the loud hailer. His voice was clear, and there was a flat undertone of menace in it. "We are armed, and if there is any trouble our instructions are to shoot. Drop those guns."

When he finished, there was a long moment of complete silence and immobility.

Anderson said, "In case you might be thinking of making a run for it, I should tell you that your cars have already been taken over."

The man standing beside the excavation, who seemed to be the leader, said something. The shotguns were dropped and the police closed in . . .

Later, Anderson said to Maggs, who had come up in defiance of strict orders to the contrary, "I think we'd better leave things as

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they are until it's light. We'll need to take photographs of things as they've been left and then maybe do a bit more digging."

"It's much too late to go to bed," said Maggs. "So why don't you come in and have a hot cup of tea, with maybe a drop of something in it?"

This seemed to everyone to be an excellent idea. Two men were left on guard and the rest came down to the farmhouse, where the fire was revived, a kettle put on, and bottles produced.

"Do you think," said Jonas, "that you could now possibly tell us what it's all about and what's been dug up? Not, I gather, the Abbey treasure?"

"Maybe more valuable than that," said Anderson. "I'm not too sure what the price of gold is today, but those six boxes are crammed with gold ingots."

Light began to dawn. Jonas said, "Of course. The Heathrow robbery."

"Lifted from the bullion store fifteen months ago. We were sure it was the Catlins, but we couldn't pin it to them—there was no trace of the loot. We kept them under surveillance for months after the robbery. They were laughing. They knew they were safe. I surmise they came off the motorway at the junction north of here, drove along until they saw a nice thick hedge, tunneled through it, and buried the stuff. Then all they had to do was wait until the heat was off. Only—"

"Only," said Jonas, and the full humor of it was beginning to strike him, "suddenly they read in the papers that the place they'd buried it was about to be given a going-over by a gang of amateur treasure-seekers."

"Aye. They had to get it out. That bull stopped them the first time. This time they had no option. They may have suspected it was a trap and they came prepared for trouble."

"So why didn't they put up a fight?"

Anderson thought about it. He said, "That robbery was a brutal job. They crippled three of the security guards. One of them's in hospital still. I expect they thought if they started anything we'd shoot their legs off."

"And would you have done?"

"That question," said Anderson, in his dominie's voice, "is what you might describe as academic . . ."

At first light, they all made their way up to the Top Field. It was whilst the photographs were being taken that the treasure hunters

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arrived. It was a party of four men and two girls, equipped with metal detectors, and led by Mr. Westall in person.

He looked with dismay at the open pit and the boxes beside it. He said, "I hope you've been very careful when removing whatever you've found. Old artefacts can so easily be damaged when handled by unskilled persons."

Anderson said to Jonas, "I think you'd better explain it to him, sir."

"I'll try," said Jonas.

It took ten minutes. Five of the treasure seekers listened to him. One of the girls had wandered off on her own. A police van had been run up on the path between the fields and the last of the bullion was being man-handled onto it when she gave them a hail. She said, "I've never used one of these things before, but it seems to be getting excited."

Attention was switched from the open pit to where she was standing at the bottom of the field. The other girl said, "I expect you're using it wrong." Mr. Westall walked over, used his own instrument, and said, "No, there's definitely something here. Do you think we could borrow those spades?"

Anderson said, "Perhaps we could give you a hand." He seemed as keen as everyone else.

"If there's anything there, it's deep down." Mr. Westall had taken pegs from his pocket and was marking out an oblong site. "Perhaps we could borrow those spades."

The police seemed keener on helping than on giving up the spades they had collected, and the amateur treasure hunters soon became glad of professional assistance, for if there was anything there it was certainly buried deep.

From time to time Mr. Westall encouraged them by announcing a strengthening of the signals. It was when they were fully four feet down and the lifting of the earth was becoming a real physical effort that they heard what they had all been waiting for. A spade struck on something that was neither earth nor stone.

Mr. Westall jumped into the pit with a flurry of anxious advice. "Hands only now," he said. "No more spades. We must use hands."

Slowly the object in the pit took shape. They could see that it was a box, perhaps six feet long and two feet wide, formed of stout oak planks bound with strips of iron. The wood had stood up to the passage of time better than the metal, which was rusted and fragile.

"Two of you at each end. Lift it very gently. That's it."

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The box was laid on the edge of the pit. Mr. Westall looked at it proudly. He said, "We shouldn't try to open it here. It ought to be taken to a place where it can be dealt with properly."

He realized, however, that the feeling of the meeting was against him.

"Well, then," he said, "we might just look. But carefully. I beg of you."

The edge of a spade was placed under one of the planks and the top lifted like a lid. Whatever it was inside was covered with several thicknesses of leather. As Mr. Westall peeled them off, everyone leaned forward. The police photographers had their cameras focused. What lay in the box was a surprise to all of them.

It was an iron crucifix.

Staring down at it, Jonas was aware that he was looking at a miracle, created by a master craftsman, some forgotten genius of the Middle Ages. The face of the man on the cross was in no way formalized. It was the face of a real person. Divine compassion of the man who had suffered the agonies of crucifixion and had forgiven his tormentors—the strength of the man who had died on the rack rather than reveal where his greatest treasure was hidden.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

AWARDS TIME: On Friday, May 4th, at New York's Sheraton Centre hotel, the Mystery Writers of America presented its annual Edgar awards, honoring the best of 1983. Winners were: Novel—*La Brava* by Elmore Leonard (Arbor House); First Novel—*The Bay Psalm Book Murder* by Will Harriss (Walker); Paperback Original—*Mrs. White* by Margaret Tracy (Dell); Short Story—"The New Girl Friend" by Ruth Rendell *(EQMM);* Critical/Biographical—*The Dark Side of Genius: The Life of Alfred Hitchcock* by Donald Spoto (Little, Brown); Fact Crime—*Very Much a Lady* by Shana Alexander (Little, Brown); Juvenile—*The Callender Papers* by Cynthia Voigt (Atheneum); Motion Picture Screenplay—*Gorky Park* by Dennis Potter (Orion Pictures).

MWA's Grand Master Award went to John le Carré, and its Reader of the Year Award was presented to Sylvia Porter. A special Edgar went to *A Bibliography of A. Conan Doyle* by Richard Lancelyn Green and John Michael Gibson (Oxford University Press). The Robert L. Fish Award, honoring the best first mystery short story, was presented next day for "Locked Doors" by Lilly Carlson *(EQMM).*

On the previous evening, at the annual awards dinner of the Crime Writers' Association in London, the winners were: Gold Dagger—*Accidental Crimes* by John Hutton (Bodley Head); Silver Dagger—*The Papers of Tony Veitch* by William McIlvanney (Hodder & Stoughton; U.S. edition, Pantheon); John Creasey Award for Best First Novel—a tie between *The Ariadne Clue* by Carol Clemeau and *The Night the Gods Smiled* by Eric Wright (both published by Collins in England and Scribners in the U.S.).

CLOAK & DAGGER: Though it was published late in 1982, I've seen no reviews of the second edition of *Cloak and Dagger Fiction: An Annotated Guide to Spy Thrillers* by Myron J. Smith, Jr. ($34.50 hardcover from ABC-Clio, Inc., Box 4397, Santa Barbara, CA 93103). The book is a vast improvement over the first edition published in 1976. It's more than twice as long,

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covering 3435 books instead of the 1675 in the earlier edition, and is handsomely designed. Included are guides to pseudonyms and series characters, as well as a brief Foreword by Clive Cussler. It's unfortunate that a number of errors still exist, mainly in titles, dates, and publishers, and the book lacks some information contained in Andy East's recent guide to 1960s spy fiction, *The Cold War File*. Still, it's the closest thing we have to a complete guide to spy fiction, and I hope Smith will continue to improve and expand it.

QUIZ BOOKS: Mystery contests and quizzes seem to be the rage in publishing circles these days. In the latter category we note the recent publication of *The James Bond Trivia Quiz Book* by Philip Gurin (Arbor House, $4.95). And from England comes the best of these I've seen: *Crime & Detection Quiz* by Julian Symons (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson). The slim 123-page book contains thirty different quizzes with over 300 questions in all. We hope American stores will have it soon.

MOVIES THAT NEVER WERE: Donald Spoto's Edgar-winning biography of Alfred Hitchcock, *The Dark Side of Genius,* now available as a Ballantine paperback at $4.95, reveals that the famed director was asked to film various mystery novels in the late 1930s.

Among the ideas Hitchcock rejected were film versions of Leslie Charteris's *The Saint in New York* and Patrick Quentin's *A Puzzle for Fools*.

SCRIBNER CONTEST: The 1984 Scribner Crime Novel Award has gone to William G. Tapply's *Death at Charity's Point* (Scribners, $12.95). Tapply is the third winner in this annual contest for the best first mystery novel.

The first winner two years ago, Carol Clemeau's *The Ariadne Clue,* as mentioned earlier, won this year's John Creasey Award in England.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Joyce Carol Oates will follow up her recent novel *Mysteries of Winterthurn* with a Gothic horror novel set in turn-of-the-century Princeton, New Jersey. *The Crosswicks Horror* will be published by Dutton early in 1985.

The second collection of John D. MacDonald's early pulp stories, *More Good Old Stuff,* is due this fall from MacDonald's new publisher, Alfred A. Knopf.

Coming this fall from Bluejay Books is *Sherlock Holmes Through Time and Space,* an anthology of Sherlockian science fiction edited by Isaac Asimov, Martin H. Greenberg, and Charles G. Waugh.

James M. Cain's final novel, *Cloud Nine,* is due in August from The Mysterious Press.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

Against All Odds, the recently released thriller directed by Taylor Hackford (who grabbed our attention with his *An Officer and a Gentleman),* is up-to-the-minute and full of color and action, yet at its core has the dark feeling of a film *noir.* As well it might, for it is culled from one of the best efforts in that genre, the 1947 *Out of the Past,* a legendary crime melodrama of almost oppressing starkness, with screenplay by Geoffrey Homes, based on his novel of the previous year, *Build My Gallows High.*

The essentials of the plot in both films are the same, although the trappings and ending differ. In the newer version, Jeff Bridges *(Winter Kills, Cutter and Bone)* is a professional football player bounced out of his contract and down on his luck, who is hired by a sinister friend—a shady nightclub owner and gambler—to find the latter's wife. The woman—Rachel Ward, of *Sharkey's Machine* and *Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid*—has absconded into Mexico with a large portion of her husband's money. Jeff manages to find her in a steamy Mexican backwater, and the two, predictably, become passionate lovers. She swears she has stolen nothing, that she has been double-crossed, that the owner will send someone after them. The two become fugitives, there is violence, and the girl disappears. When the scene shifts back to the States, Jeff is forced to undertake one more mission for his manipulative friend, and more violence flares.

The original movie—with Robert Mitchum as the hero (in this case a private detective) and Kirk Douglas as the gambler who hires him—follows this same line of action, only the body count is somewhat higher and the conclusion is far more grim. Indeed, contemporary reviews found the film "tough" and "unpleasant." So it was, but it has become a memorable example of its kind: the crime film in which the doomed hero is pulled down by dark fates. In comparison, *Against All Odds* is far too bright, and its sunny, hopeful ending almost violates the spirit of the genre.

What the new film has going for it is the wonderful cast which surrounds the principal players. James Woods, so good as the manic cop-killer in *The Onion Field,* here personifies sleazy evil as the nightclub owner. Interestingly, the still beautiful Jane Greer—who played the lethal heroine in *Out of the Past*— portrays the character's *mother* in this remake, a rich Los Angeles landowner who is one of the forces tightening the web around Jeff Bridges. And Richard Widmark is always welcome in the sort of role he plays here: the suave, unsavory lawyer with silk

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suits and underworld connections.

But what pleases most of all in *Against All Odds* are its familiar cachets of traditional mystery drama—the beset hero, the ruthless forces of evil encircling, the femme fatale, the claustrophobic darkness. The mix may be imperfect, but the source is rich. One can hope that other, even better remakes will be served up to us out of the past.

The Edgar Allan Poe Awards for mystery achievements in 1983 were recently presented by the Mystery Writers of America, and the winner in the television movie category was *Mickey Spillane's Murder Me, Murder You* by Bill Stratton, a hard-hitting private-eye whodunit to which Spillane actually contributed nothing (except such guidelines as Mike Hammer not sporting long hair), but which was so Spillanelike a pastiche that it could be any three Hammer books. The film (on CBS), starring Stacy Keach, was somewhat breathless but likeable, and Don Stroud assisted excellently as Captain Pat Chambers, the cop pal with whom Hammer would movingly commiserate about the immorality of our undisciplined times.

The Edgar winner for the best series episode went this year to a cable show, HBO's splendid *Philip Marlowe, Private Eye,* which dramatized five Chandler short stories. "The Pencil" was scripted by Jo Eisinger, a veteran writer who knew Chandler and whose credits go back to Rita Hayworth's classic *Gilda,* and tells how Marlowe guards a mobster warned he is to be a syndicate target by being sent a pencil—signifying he's been crossed off the list.

The program is full of authentic criminal slang (such as "mechanic" for hired assassin) and meticulous period Los Angeles settings—although the interiors were all done in London. Powers Boothe makes an excellent Marlowe, the narration is richly Chandleresque, and the seedy mean streets are there once more for the prowling. A well deserved award.

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THE JURY BOX

by ALLEN J. HUBIN

One might think, with all the attention paid to Arthur Conan Doyle and his works over the years, that everything he wrote would long ago have been collected and analyzed in paralyzing detail. Certainly this is true of the Holmes stories: Sherlockian material occupies two mammoth bibliographies (Ronald De Waal's *The World*

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Bibliography of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson and *The International Sherlock Holmes)* and is growing.

But burrowing in British magazines published from 1879 to 1930 has produced for editors John Michael Gibson and Richard Lancelyn Green an unexpected treasure: *Uncollected Stories by Arthur Conan Doyle* (Doubleday, $14.95), consisting of 33 tales, ten only just attributed to him. The fare and quality vary, but here are useful insights into Doyle's writing career and interests. Eighteen stories are set in England, the rest here and there (including the U.S.) around the globe. About half can be called crime stories; the remainder offer love, domestic, adventure, humor, or war themes. Essentially no detection is present in any, but one, "The Recollections of Captain Wilkie," probably written in the early 1880s, hints at the Sherlock Holmes that was to come. It's very good to have this volume to complete Doyle's fictional oeuvre.

Nan Hamilton debuts delightfully, with feeling and keen cultural insight, in *Killer's Rights* (Walker, $12.95). Japanese-American Sam Ohara is a Los Angeles police detective with a newly assigned black partner and a fresh corpse on his hands. Said body, despite its clean-cut appearance, proves to be that of a psychopath with connections to organized crime. The quest for his killer leads to the Japanese community and to rival mobs in the drug racket. More, Nan Hamilton!

Robert Barnard's latest novel, *School for Murder* (Scribners, $12.95), dissects with surgical wit a curious element in British education, the entrepreneurial boys' preparatory school. Burleigh is owned by Edward Cornwallis, who has Manner but the humor, sensitivity, and generosity of a viper. He has assembled a staff unemployable elsewhere and acquired students through parental indifference, ignorance, or misplaced pretention. Burleigh, thus writhing with incompetence and petty conflicts, is also visited by malevolence, leading ultimately to violent death. This hands Superintendent Michael Pumfrey a gloomy challenge: stir the ghastly stew until a killer bobs to the surface. This is one of Barnard's best.

Colin Dexter's sixth investigation for Inspector Morse, *The Riddle of the Third Mile* (St. Martin's, $11.95), is something special: intricately plotted, baffling, a fascinating study of people and intent. A sixtyish Oxford don disappears under very curious circumstances; a corpse (sans head, legs, hands) turns up in the Oxford Canal. Evidence suggests it's that of the don—or is someone being nearly as clever as Morse? Threads lead to a desert campaign in World War II, to the honors selection process at Oxford, to—can it be?—Morse's student romance before he failed out of Oxford. Don't miss this—and the earlier Morse novels are also well worth tracking down.

Adam Kennedy's *The Domino Vendetta* (Beaufort, $14.95) is the sequel to *The Domino Principle* (1975) and continues the story of

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Roy Tucker, loser. Here he's offered a deal: do a little job and dodge a long jail term, be well paid and be reunited with his wife. The job proves to be the assassination of a former U.S. president, and now Tucker can't back out. After the job he's a liability, and the folks who are masterminding the country to their own power-hungry ends want him dead. But Tucker, for all his unsophistication, proves a slippery target and—when his wife is killed—he turns hunter, hunter with nothing to lose. Gripping suspense.

The picture of U.S. Treasury agents that Gerald Petievich paints in *To Live and Die in L.A.* (Arbor House, $14.95) is uncompromisingly grim: one is willing to do anything to close a case or satisfy himself sexually, his partner is too weak to resist illegalities, another plays games to retire on the heels of a success, and their boss is a tiny-minded manipulator. The moral difference between agents and their prey is thus minuscule. The prey is Rick Masters, whose years of successful and unconvicted counterfeiting, his network of distributors and his slippery legal counsel, intensely frustrate the Treasury. You may not like the characters, but you'll remember this novel.

Die Again, Macready by Jack Livingston (St. Martin's, $13.95) is the second appearance for deaf New York City private eye Joe Binney, and a premier example of plotting and casting it is, with flashes of brilliance in description. Macready is at the top of the acting racket, with a TV producer willing to pay anything for his services. But Macready is distracted: his manager has disappeared with a good bit of the Macready loot. Binney is hired to find him, and does—dead, money gone.

That's just for openers—this complex tale defies summarization. Read it!

I missed Linda Barnes' first two novels about Michael Spraggue, Boston actor and sometimes unlicensed private sleuth. But I'm much charmed by the third, *Dead Heat* (St. Martin's, $11.95), altogether a tidy and captivating tale. Somebody seems to want a U.S. Senator dead instead of re-elected. Spraggue—quite an interesting fellow—is reluctantly drawn in at the stage of threatening letters and potshots with a rifle. The senator plans to run in the Boston marathon for publicity, and that's a fine setting for murder. It's up to Spraggue to sort it out before the killer makes a habit of it.

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"Q"

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The game is the same one Toby always plays and she loves how she always makes it end . . .

MAKING BELIEVE

by TONITA S. GARDNER

Toby wanders from room to room. She is looking for something! She doesn't know what it is. At last she pauses, stops to listen. She hears a bird. But how could that be? All the birds are gone. Or dead. Frozen outside in the snowy stillness. Toby reminds herself that she forgot to throw bread crumbs out for them. Maybe if she had, the birds would still be alive.

But Toby always forgets. Until it's too late. Just as it was with Mama. Toby had meant to call the doctor. But then she forgot. And by the time she remembered, Mama was so sick that even the doctor wouldn't have mattered. Besides, the snow had started and how would the doctor have gotten through?

Excuses. Excuses. Toby giggles to herself. She wanders back from where she came. Mama's room. Mama is still there. Asleep in the bed. But Toby knows better. Mama isn't asleep. Mama is dead. And soon the moving men are coming. Toby has to figure out a way to get Mama out of the house before they get here.

She goes down to the kitchen. The remains of a loaf of bread are out on the counter. The bread is hard and crumbly. Toby breaks off a piece. She puts it in her mouth. She chews and thinks at the same time, then remembers that the bread is for the birds, she shouldn't be eating it. She looks in the 'fridge. The 'fridge is empty. What is she going to do?

So many things to think about, so many plans to make. Toby doesn't know where to begin. She looks up the number of the moving company. She'll call them back and tell them not to come until she can think of some way to move Mama out of the house. Or hide her somewhere inside. She pictures the old trunk in the attic. But before she can go and empty it, the phone rings. She grabs it at once.

"Hello?"

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"Toby, this is Dr. Barnes. May I speak to your mother?"

"Mama is sleeping," says Toby.

"How is she feeling?" he asks.

Toby wonders how Dr. Barnes found out Mama was sick. "Fine," she says.

"Then I won't disturb her, Toby. Just tell her I called."

"Okay," says Toby. She puts down the receiver. Her stomach starts to growl. She breaks off another piece of stale bread—a very small piece this time. She's hungry but so are the birds. Slowly she chews the hard scrap, trying to make it last as long as possible. But it's gone before she can stop it, swallowed into her still growling stomach. She sighs and pours herself a big glass of water.

She's about to have another glassful when she hears a knock at the kitchen door. She opens it.

The boy from the Acme Market is standing on the back porch. He's holding a bag of groceries in each arm. "Where can I put these?" he asks.

She points to the kitchen table. Mama always tells the boy to wipe his feet before he comes in. But now the kitchen floor is so dirty it wouldn't make a difference. Toby was supposed to wash it but she forgot. She stares at the brown paper bags. Her mouth waters as she sees the stalks of celery in one and the cartons of milk and eggs in the other. She tries to remember when Mama ordered these groceries.

"How much?" she asks and feels confused. Where is her money? Then she reminds herself. She has no money. Mama always takes care of paying for everything. All Toby ever gets is whatever small change she finds at the bottom of Mama's pocketbook.

"I'll put them on your charge," says the boy.

"Yes," says Toby. "And Mama will pay for it at the end of the month." Picturing Mama upstairs in her bed, Toby stifles a giggle and reaches into her apron pocket. Her pill is there, the one Mama gave her just before she died. So is a nickel and a penny. She gives the money to the boy.

"Gee, thanks," he says. "Now I can buy a new dirt bike." He rolls his eyes upward and bounds out of the house.

Toby unpacks the groceries. She breaks off a stalk of celery and nibbles it, not bothering to wash it the way Mama always does. Or did. Then she pours some milk and drinks it along with a whole box of chocolate-chip cookies. Mama would be furious with her for eating the whole box at once, but Mama will never know about it. Toby

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flings the empty box into the garbage. It misses. She leaves it in the middle of the floor with all the stuff from last night's dinner.

She wipes her mouth on the edge of the tablecloth and goes upstairs to her room. Using the rough edges of her bitten fingernails, she picks at the wallpaper—what's left of it. It's one of the things she likes best to do. Daddy hung the paper when Toby was a little girl. It was white with pink roses and green leaves. Now the white is dark-grey and the leaves have faded to the color of old mustard and the pink roses look washed-out and sad. Toby glances at the spotted mirror. She also looks washed-out and sad. She wonders if it's because she still misses her daddy. Daddy ran away so long ago that Toby's hair was as brown and curly as his. Now her hair is almost as grey and wispy as Mama's. Toby wishes she could call him up and say "Hi, Dad. This is Toby. Remember me?" But she doesn't know where he is. Mama knows. Or knew. But Mama wouldn't say.

"I want to call him *up,* Mama," Toby used to beg. "I want to talk to my daddy!"

"Forget him," Mama said. "I don't want you to mention him again."

"Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!" Toby says out loud. "There, I mentioned him, Mama! And nothing you can do about it!" She pushes out her mouth and places her hands on her hips the way Mama always does when she wants to show Toby who's boss.

But Mama won't be doing that any more.

Toby goes up to the attic. She takes her old dolls out of the big trunk. A daddy doll, a mama doll, and a little-girl doll. Then she plays the game. It's the same one she always plays and she loves how she always makes it end.

First she puts the dolls at the doll table—the daddy at one end, the mama at the other, the girl in between. Then, in turn, she takes each doll's part, helping them to feed themselves even though the food is only pretend food. Then she makes the father doll look up at the mother doll and say, "Why do you always overcook the meat? You know I don't like it that way."

And the mother doll says "If you can do better, why don't you cook it yourself?"

Toby changes to the father doll's voice. "I do enough. I work all day in the store."

"And I work all day in the house. Just looking after *her* is no easy job, let me tell you." With Toby's help, the mother doll points at the girl doll.

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"If you'd stop picking on her, she'd be fine."

"Yes," says the girl doll. "I don't like you, Mama."

"Go to your room!"

"I don't like my room!" Toby sounds like a little girl. "It's ugly!"

The mother doll jumps up and grabs the girl doll by the arm. "Go, I said."

"Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!"

"Do as your mother says," the father doll tells the girl.

"But I hate my room!"

"Tell you what. I'll fix it up for you. New wallpaper, Toby. How would you like that?"

She pauses. "Okay, Daddy."

"Some good that'll do her," says the mother doll.

"You shut up!" Toby picks up the mother doll and smacks her head against the floor again and again, then throws her back in the trunk. She leaves the girl doll and the daddy doll sitting at the table.

She goes down the stairs. Again she hears the sound of birds. She peeks out the window. The sun is shining. All the snow is gone and the grass is ankle-deep around the front porch. Across the way, the neighbor's yard is bright with red and yellow tulips and pink cherry blossoms. No wonder Toby heard birds singing. She can't understand why she got mixed up about the time of year. It hasn't snowed in months. What made her think it was still winter? Toby hates winter. She's glad winter is over. But if she was wrong about that, then maybe she's wrong about other things.

Mama, for instance. She tiptoes down the hall and pushes open Mama's door. Mama is in her bed, all bunched up like a sack of dirty clothes.

Toby thinks about the moving men. When had she called them?

She remembers. She called them this morning, just before it started to snow. "Hurry over here," she'd said. "I have to move out of my house in a hurry."

"Sure, lady," the voice at the other end told her. "That's the White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Right?"

"No," said Toby. "It's the blue one on Halsey Street. The number is on the door."

"Gotcha," said the man. "We'll get right over there."

But where are they?

Toby pictures them stuck in the snow. And reminds herself the snow is gone. Or maybe it never was.

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She sighs and heads back to her room to pick off some more wallpaper.

The bell rings.

The moving men. It must be the moving men.

Maybe if she tells them Mama's asleep they won't notice she's dead.

"Don't disturb my mother—" she rehearses what she plans to say as she opens the door.

But instead of the moving men it's Dr. Barnes.

"Good morning, Toby. Isn't this the most beautiful day you ever saw?" He steps inside. "And how are *you* feeling, my dear?"

"Fine," says Toby.

"You're taking your pills, I hope."

"Oh, sure." Toby giggles and wonders if he knows she's telling a fib.

But Dr. Barnes has grabbed the railing and is hoisting himself up the stairs one slow step at a time. Dr. Barnes is very old.

Toby follows behind. When Dr. Barnes gets to Mama's room he knocks and goes inside and shuts the door behind him.

Toby stands at the door and tries to imagine what he'll do when he finds Mama dead.

"Well," she hears him say, "how is my patient this lovely spring morning?"

"Better," says a voice that must be Mama! "That long sleep did me a world of good." Mama is using her sweet chirpy voice, the one she always uses to everyone except Toby—and, long ago, Daddy.

Toby's skin crawls. So Mama is alive, after all! Mama was only making believe she was dead! She was just sleeping and lying so still Toby was sure she'd died!

Toby sinks to her knees and hugs herself tightly. She feels cold and wonders if it's started snowing again.

"Well, Gertrude," she hears the doctor say, "it's my considered guess that you'll live to be a hundred."

"I guess I'll have to," Mama says. "Otherwise who'll look after Toby?"

"How is she doing?"

"Same as always," says Mama. "But I guess we all have our crosses to bear."

"Just keep her on her medication and she'll be as gentle as a lamb. Otherwise, with her condition—" He leaves the sentence unfinished.

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"That's all I'd need," says Mama. "My own daughter turning violent and murdering me in my bed."

"Just make sure she swallows her medicine."

Toby hears the phone ring. The phone doesn't ring much at all. She dashes back downstairs to the kitchen to answer it, but Mama has picked it up in her room. She hears Mama saying, "Of course not. Whatever gave you that idea?"

"There's a sign on your mailbox," the voice says to Mama. "House For Sale. I saw it when I drove by."

"Somebody must be playing a joke," says Mama. "This house is not for sale."

Toby recalls how she'd found the sign in the attic and went and taped it to the mailbox early this morning just before it started to snow.

She hears Mama calling and hangs up the receiver.

"Tobee—!"

She trudges upstairs and into Mama's room. Dr. Barnes is closing up his black bag and saying goodbye to Mama.

"Yes, Mama?"

"Dr. Barnes says you mustn't forget to take your pill. Did you do it?"

"Yes, Mama."

"Are you sure? I didn't see you."

"You were asleep, Mama."

The doctor hobbles toward the stairs. Toby sees him out the door, then hurries to her room. Under her dresser is a little box. She opens it and reaches into her apron pocket for today's pill. Then she hides the pill in the box with all the others she has spit out when Mama wasn't looking.

Waiting until Dr. Barnes's car has pulled away, she giggles softly to herself, gets the bread from the kitchen, and starts outside to feed the birds. But it is snowing again and they are nowhere to be seen.

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a NEW short story by

RUTH RENDELL

In May of this year, at the annual Mystery Writers of America Dinner in New York, five stories were nominated for best short mystery story published in the U.S. in 1983—all five from EQMM. Nominated were Simon Brett's "Big Boy, Little Boy," Stanley Ellin's "Graffiti," Joseph Hansen's "The Anderson Boy," Clark Howard's "Puerto Rican Blues," and Ruth Rendell's "The New Girl Friend." The winner was Ruth Rendell and we're proud and pleased to bring you a new story by this vigorous, virtuosic writer.

Two husbands on holiday in Greece with their wives and children. Michael, the obsessive, caring father, and Teddy, who liked to have things pleasant about him . . .

FATHER'S DAY

by RUTH RENDELL

Teddy had once read in a story written by a Victorian that a certain character liked "to have things pleasant about him." The phrase had stuck in his mind. He, too, liked to have things pleasant about him.

It was to be hoped that pleasantness would prevail while they were all away on holiday together. Teddy was beginning to be afraid they might get on each other's nerves. Anyway, it would be the last time for years the four of them would be able to go away in October, for both Emma and Andrew started school in the spring.

"A pity," Anne said. "May and October are absolutely the best times in the Greek Islands."

She and Teddy had bought the house with the money Teddy's mother had left him. The previous year they had been there twice

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and again last May. They hadn't been able to go out in the evenings because they had no baby-sitter. Having Michael and Linda there would make it possible for each couple to go out every other night.

"If Michael will trust us with his children," said Teddy.

"He isn't as bad as that."

"I didn't say he was bad. He's my brother-in-law and I've got to put up with him. He's all right. It's just that he's so nuts about his kids I sometimes wonder how he dares leave them with their own mother when he goes to work."

He was recalling the time they had all spent at Chichester in July and how the evening had been spoilt by Michael's insisting on phoning the baby-sitter before the play began, during the interval, and before they began the drive home. And when he wasn't on the phone or obliged to be silent in the theater, he had talked continually about Andrew and Alison in a fretful way.

"He's under a lot of stress," Linda had whispered to her sister. "He's going through a bad patch at work."

Teddy didn't think it natural for a man to be so involved with his children. He was fond of his own children, of course he was, and anxious enough about them when he had cause, but they were little still and, let's face it, sometimes tiresome and boring. He looked forward to the time when they were older and there could be real companionship. Michael was more like a mother than a father, a mother hen. Teddy, for his sins, had occasionally changed diapers and made up formula but Michael actually seemed to enjoy doing these things and talking about them afterwards. Teddy hoped he wouldn't be treated to too much Dr. Jolly philosophy while on Stamnos.

Just before they went, about a week before, Valerie Wilton's marriage broke up. Valerie had been at school with Anne, though just as much Linda's friend, and had written long letters to both of them, explaining everything and asking for their understanding. She had gone off with a man she met at her Commercial French evening class. Apparently the affair had been going on for a long time but Valerie's husband had known nothing about it and her departure had come to him as a total shock. He came round and poured out his troubles to Anne and drank a lot of Scotch and broke down and cried. For all Teddy knew, he did the same at Linda's. Teddy stayed out of it—he didn't want to get involved. Liking to have things pleasant about him, he declined gently but firmly even to discuss it with Anne.

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"Linda says it's really upset Michael," said Anne. "He identifies with George, you see. He's so emotional."

"I said I wasn't going to talk about it, darling, and by golly I'm not!"

During the flight, Michael had Alison on his lap and Andrew in the seat beside him. Anne remarked in a plaintive way that it was all right for Linda. Teddy saw that Linda slept most of the way. She was a beautiful girl—better-looking than Anne, most people thought, though Teddy didn't—and now that Michael was making more money she had bought a lot of new clothes and was having her hair cut in a very stylish way. Teddy, who was quite observant, especially of attractive things, noted that recently she had stopped wearing trousers. He looked appreciatively across the aisle at her long slim legs.

They changed planes at Athens. It was a fine clear day, and as the aircraft came in to land you could see the wine-jar shape of the island from which it took its name. Stamnos was no more than twenty miles long but the road was poor and rutted, winding up and down over low olive-clad mountains, and it took over an hour for the car to get to Votani at the wine jar's mouth. The driver, a Stamniot, was one of those Greeks who spend their youth in Australia before returning home to start a business on the money they have made. He talked all the way in a harsh, clattering Greek-Strine while his radio played bouzouki music and Alison whimpered in Michael's arms. It was hot for the time of year.

Tim, who was a bad traveler, had been carsick twice by the time they reached Votani. The car couldn't go up the narrow flagged street, so they had to get out and carry the baggage, the driver helping with a case in each hand and one on his head. Michael didn't carry a case because he had Andrew on his shoulders and Alison in his arms.

The houses of Votani covered a shallow conical hill so that it looked from a distance like a heap of pastel-colored pebbles. Close to, the buildings were neat, crowded, interlocking, hung with jasmine and bougainvillea, and the hill itself was surmounted by the ruins—extravagantly picturesque—of a Crusaders' fortress. Teddy and Anne's house was three fishermen's cottages that its previous owner had converted into one. It had a lot of little staircases on account of being built on the steep hillside. From the bedroom where the four children would sleep, you could see the eastern walls of the fortress, a dark-blue expanse of sea, and, smudgy on the horizon, the

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Turkish coast. The dark came quickly after the sun had gone. Teddy, when abroad, always found that disconcerting after England, with its long protracted dusks.

Within an hour of reaching Votani, he found himself walking down the main street—a stone-walled defile smelling of jasmine and lit by lamps on iron brackets—towards Agamemnon's Bar. He felt guilty about going out and leaving Anne to put the children to bed, but it had been Anne's suggestion—indeed at Anne's insistence—that he should take Michael out for a drink before supper. A whispered colloquy had established they both thought Michael looked "washed-out" (Anne's expression) and "fed-up" (Teddy's) and no wonder, the way he had been attending to Andrew and Alison's wants all day.

Michael had needed a lot of persuading, had at first been determined to stay and help Linda, and it therefore rather surprised Teddy when he began on a grumbling tirade against women's liberation.

"I sometimes wonder what they mean, they're not 'equal,' " he said. "They have the children, don't they? We can't do that. I consider that makes them *superior* rather than inferior."

"I know *I* shouldn't like to have a baby," said Teddy irrelevantly.

"It's because of that," said Michael as if Teddy hadn't spoken, "that we need to master them. We have to for our own sakes. Where should we be if they had the babies and the whip hand, too?"

Teddy said vaguely that he didn't know about whip hand, but someone had said that the hand which rocks the cradle rules the world. By this time they were in Agamemnon's, sitting at a table on the vine-covered terrace. The other customers were all Stamniots, some of who recognized Teddy and nodded at him and smiled. Most of the tourists had gone by now and all but one of the hotels were closed for the winter. Hedonistic Teddy, wanting to have things pleasant about him, hadn't cared for the turn the conversation was taking. He began telling Michael how amused he and Anne had been when they found that the proprietor of the bar was called after the great hero of classical antiquity and how ironical it had seemed, for this Agamemnon was small and fat.—Here he was forced to break off as stout, smiling Agamemnon came to take their order.

Michael had no intention of letting Teddy begin once more on the subject of Stamniot names. He spoke in a rapid, violent tone, his thin dark face pinched with intensity.

"A man can lose his children any time and through no fault of his own. Have you ever thought of that?"

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Teddy looked at him. Notions of kidnaping, of mortal illness, came into his head. "What do you mean?"

"It could happen to you or me, to any of us. A man can lose his children overnight and he can't do a thing about it. He may be a good, faithful husband, a good provider, a devoted father—that won't make a scrap of difference. Look at George Wilton. What did George do wrong? Nothing. But he lost his children just the same. One day they were living with him in his house and the next they were in Gerrards Cross with Valerie and that Commercial French chap and he'll be lucky if he sees them once a fortnight."

"I see what you're getting at," said Teddy. "He couldn't look after them, though, could he? He's got to go to work. I mean, I see it's unfair, but you can't take kids away from their mother, can you?"

"Apparently not. But you can take them from their father."

"I shouldn't worry about one isolated case if I were you," said Teddy, feeling very uncomfortable. "You want to forget that sort of thing while you're here. Unwind a bit."

"An isolated case is just what it isn't. There's someone at work, John Frost, you don't know him. He and his wife split up—at her wish, naturally—and she took their baby with her as a matter of course. And George told me the same thing happened in his brother's marriage a couple of years back. Three children he had. He *lived* for his children, and now he gets to take them to the zoo every other Saturday."

"Maybe," said Teddy, who had his moments of shrewdness, "if he'd lived for his wife a bit more it wouldn't have happened."

He was glad to be back in the house. In bed that night he told Anne about it. Anne said Michael was an obsessional person. When he'd first met Linda, he'd been obsessed by her and now it was Andrew and Alison. He wasn't very nice to Linda these days, she'd noticed—he was always watching her in an unpleasant way. And when Linda had suggested she take the children up to the fortress in the morning if he wanted to go down to the harbor and see the fishing boats come in, he had said: "No way am I going to allow you up there on your own with my children."

Later in the week, they all went. You had to keep your eye on the children every minute of the time, there were so many places to fall over—fissures in the walls, crumbling corners, holes that opened onto the empty blue air. But the view from the eastern walls, breached in a dozen places, where the crag fell away in an almost

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vertical sweep to a beach of creamy silver sand and brown rocks, was the best on Stamnos. You could see the full extent of the bay that was the lip of the wine jar and the sea with its scattering of islands and the low mountains of Turkey, behind which, Teddy thought romantically, perhaps lay the Plain of Troy. The turf up here was slippery, dry as clean combed hair. No rain had fallen on Stamnos for five months. The sky was a smooth mauvish-blue, cloudless and clear. Emma and Andrew, the bigger ones, ran about on the slippery turf, enjoying it because it was slippery, falling over and slithering down the slopes.

Teddy had successfully avoided being alone with Michael since their conversation in the bar, but later that day Michael caught him. Teddy put it that way to himself but in fact it was more as if, unwittingly, he had caught Michael. He had gone down to the grocery store, had bought the red apples, the feta cheese, and the olive oil Anne wanted, and had passed into the inner room, which was a second-hand bookstore stuffed full with paperbacks in a variety of European languages discarded by the thousand tourists who had come to Votani that summer. The room was empty but for Michael, who was standing in a far corner, having taken down from a shelf a novel whose title was its heroine's name.

"That's a Swedish translation," said Teddy gently.

"Oh, is it? Yes, I see."

"The English books are all over here."

Michael's face looked haggard in the gloom of the shop. He didn't tan easily in spite of being so dark. They came out into the sunlight, Teddy carrying his purchases in the string bag, pausing now and then to look down over a wall or through a gateway. Down there the meadows spread out to the sea, olives with the black nets laid under them to catch the harvest, cypresses thin as thorns. The shepherd's dog was bringing the flock in and the sheep bells made a distant tinkling music. Michael's shadow fell across the sunlit wall.

"I was off in a dream," said Teddy. "Beautiful, isn't it? I love it. It makes me quite sad to think we shan't come here in October again for maybe—what?—twelve or fourteen years?"

"I can't say it bothers me to have to make sacrifices for the sake of my children."

Teddy thought this reproof uncalled-for and he would have liked to rejoin with something sharp, but he wasn't very good at innuendo. And in any case, before he could come up with anything Michael had begun on quite a different subject.

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"The law in Greece has relaxed a lot in the past few years in favor of women—property rights and divorce and so on."

Teddy said, not without a spark of malice, "Jolly good, isn't it?"

"Those things are the first cracks in the fabric of a society that lead to its ultimate breakdown."

"*Our* society hasn't broken down."

Michael gave a scathing laugh as if at the naivety of this comment. "Throughout the Nineteenth Century," he said in severe lecturing tones, "and a good deal of this one, if a woman left her husband the children stayed with him as a matter of course. The children were never permitted to be with the guilty party. And there was a time, not so long ago, when a man could use the law to compel his wife to return to him."

"You wouldn't want that back, would you?"

"I'll tell you something, Teddy. There's a time coming when children won't have fathers—that is, it won't matter who your father is any more. You'll know your mother and that'll be enough. That's the way things are moving, no doubt about it. Now in the Middle Ages, men believed that in matters of reproduction the woman was merely the vessel—the man's seed was what made the child. From that we've come full circle, we've come to the nearly total supremacy of women, and men like you and me are reduced to—mere temporary agents."

Teddy said to Anne that night, "You don't think he's maybe a bit mad, do you? I mean broken down under the strain?"

"He hasn't got any strain here."

"I'll tell you the other thing I was wondering. Linda's not up to anything, is she? I mean giving some other chap a whirl? She's all dressed up these days and she's lost weight. She looks years younger. If she's got someone, that would account for poor old Michael, wouldn't it?"

It was their turn to go out in the evening and they were on their way back from the Krini Restaurant, the last one on the island to remain open after the middle of October. The night was starry, the moon three-quarters of a glowing white orb.

"There has to be a reason for him being like that. It's not normal. I don't spend my time worrying you're going to leave me and take the kids."

"Is that what it is? He's afraid Linda's going to leave him?"

"It must be. He can't be getting in a tizzy over George Wilton and Somebody Frost's problems." Sage Teddy nodded his head. "Human

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nature isn't like that," he said. "Let's go up to the fort, darling. We've never been up there by moonlight."

They climbed to the top of the hill, Teddy puffing a bit on account of having had rather too much ouzo at the Krini. In summer the summit was floodlit, but when the hotels closed the lights also went out. The moonlight was nearly as bright and the turf shone silver between the black shadows made by the broken walls. The Stamniots were desperate for rain now the tourist season was over, for the final boost to swell the olive crop.

Teddy went up the one surviving flight of steps into the remains of the one surviving tower. He paused, waiting for Anne. He looked down but he couldn't see her.

"The Aegean's not always calm," came her voice. "Down here there's a current that tears in and out like a mill race."

He still couldn't see her, peering out from his lookout post. Then he did—just. She was silhouetted against the purplish starriness.

"Come back!" he shouted. "You're too near the edge!"

He had made her jump. She turned quickly and at once slipped on the turf, going into a long slide on her back, legs in the air. Teddy ran down the steps. He ran across the turf, nearly falling himself, picked her up and hugged her.

"Suppose you'd fallen the other way!"

The palms of her hands were pitted with grit and in places the skin broken, where she had ineffectually made a grab at the sides of the fissure in the wall. "I wouldn't have fallen at all if you hadn't shouted at me."

At home the children were all asleep, Linda in bed but Michael still up. There were two empty wine bottles on the table and three glasses. A man they had met the night before in Agamemnon's had come in to have a drink with them, Michael said. He was German, from Heidelberg, here on his own for a late holiday.

"He was telling us about his divorce. His wife found a younger man with better job prospects who was able to offer Werner's children a swimming pool and riding lessons. Werner tried to kill himself but someone found him in time."

What a gloomy way to spend an evening, thought Teddy, and was trying to find something cheerful to say when a shrill yell came from the children's room. Teddy couldn't for the life of him have said which one it was, but Michael could. He knew his Alison's voice and in he went to comfort her. Teddy made a face at Anne and Anne

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cast up her eyes. Linda came out of her bedroom in her dressing gown.

"That awful man!" she said. "Has he gone? He looks like a toad. Why don't we seem to know anyone any more who hasn't got a broken marriage?"

"You know *us*," said Teddy.

"Yes, thank God."

Michael took his children down to the beach most mornings. Teddy took his children to the beach, too, and would have gone to the bay on the other side of the headland except that Emma and Tim wanted to be with their cousins and Tim started bawling when Teddy demurred. So Teddy had to put up a show of being very pleased and delighted at the sight of Michael. The children were in and out of the pale clear green water. It was still very hot at noon.

"Like August," said Teddy. "By golly, it's a scorcher here in August."

"Heat and cold don't mean all that much to me," said Michael.

Resisting the temptation to say "Bully for you" or "I should be so lucky" or something on those lines, Teddy began to talk of plans for the following day—the hire car to Likythos, the visit to the monastery with the Byzantine relics, and to the temple of Apollo. Michael turned on him a face so wretched, so hag-ridden, the eyes positively screwed with pain, that Teddy, who had been disliking and resenting him with schoolboy indignation, was moved by pity to the depths of himself. The poor old boy, he thought, the poor devil. What's wrong with him?

"When Andrew and Alison are with me like they are now," Michael began in a low rapid voice, "it's not so bad. I always have that feeling, you see, that I could pick them up and run away with them and hide them." He looked earnestly at Teddy. "I'm strong—I'm young still. I could easily carry them both long distances. I could hide them. But there isn't anywhere in the civilized world you can hide for long, is there? Still, as I say, it's not so bad when they're with me, when there are just the three of us on our own. It's when I have to go out and leave them with *her*.

"I can't tell you how I feel going home. All the way in the train and walking up from the station, I'm imagining going into that house and not hearing them—just silence and a note on the mantelpiece. I dread going home, I don't mind telling you, Teddy, and yet I long for it. Of course I do. I long to see them and know they're

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there and still mine. I say to myself, That's another day's reprieve. Sometimes I phone home half a dozen times in the day just to know she hasn't taken them away."

Teddy was aghast. He didn't know what to say. It was as if the sun had gone in and all was cold and comfortless and hateful. The sea glittered—it looked hard and huge, an enemy.

"It hasn't been so bad while we've been here," said Michael. "Oh, I expect I've been a bore for you. I'm sorry about that, Teddy, I know what a misery I am. I keep thinking that when we get home it will all start again."

"Has Linda, then—?" Teddy stammered. "I mean, Linda isn't—?"

Michael shook his head. "Not yet, not yet. But she's young, too, isn't she? She's attractive. She's got years yet ahead of her—years of torture for me, Teddy, before my kids grow up."

Anne told Teddy she had spoken to Linda about it. "She never looks at another man, she wouldn't. She's breaking her heart over Michael. She lost weight and bought those clothes because she felt she'd let herself go after Alison was born and she ought to try and be more attractive for him. This obsession of his is wearing her out. She wants him to see a psychiatrist but he won't."

"The trouble is," said Teddy, "there's a certain amount of truth behind it. There's method in his madness. If Linda met a man she liked and went off with him—I mean, Michael could drive her to it if he went on like this—she *would* take the children and Michael *would* lose them."

"Not you, too!"

"Well, no. I'm not potty like poor old Michael. I hope I'm a reasonable man. But it does make you think. A woman decides her marriage doesn't work any more and the husband can lose his kids, his home, and maybe half his income. I mean, if I were twenty-five again and hadn't ever met you I might think twice about getting married, by golly, I might."

Their last evening it was Anne and Teddy's turn to baby-sit for Michael and Linda. They were dining with Werner at the Hotel Daphne. Linda wore a green-silk dress, the color of shallow sea water.

"More cozy chat about adultery and suicide, I expect," said Teddy. Liking to have things pleasant about him, he settled himself with a large ouzo on the terrace under the vine. "I shan't be altogether

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sorry to get home. And I'll tell you what. We could come at Easter next year, in Emma's school hols."

"On our own," said Anne.

Michael came in about ten. He was alone. Teddy saw that the palms of his hands were pitted as if he had held onto the rough surface of something stony. Anne got up.

"Where's Linda?"

He hesitated before replying. A look of cunning of the kind sane people's expressions never show spread over his face. His eyes shifted along the terrace, to the right, to the left. Then he looked at the palm of his right hand and began rubbing it with his thumb.

"At the hotel," he said. "With Werner."

Anne cottoned on before he did, Teddy could see. She took a step towards Michael.

"What on earth do you mean, with Werner?"

"She's left me. She's going home to Germany with him tomorrow."

"Michael, that just isn't true. She can't stand him, she told me so. She said he was like a toad."

"Yes, she did," said Teddy. "I heard her say that."

"All right, so she isn't with Werner. Have it your own way. Did the children wake up?"

"Never mind the children, Michael, they're O.K. Tell us where Linda is, please. Don't play games."

He didn't answer. He went back into the house, the bead curtain making a rattling swish as he passed through it. Anne and Teddy looked at each other.

"I'm frightened," Anne said.

"Yes, so am I frankly," said Teddy.

The curtain rattled as Michael came through, carrying his children, Andrew over his shoulder, Alison in the crook of his arm, both of them more or less asleep.

"I scraped my hands on the stones up there," he said. "The turf's as slippery as glass." He gave Anne and Teddy a great wide empty smile. "Just wanted to make sure the children were all right, I'll put them back to bed again." He began to giggle with a kind of triumphant relief. "I shan't lose them now. She won't take them from me now."

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Asked for information about herself, EQMM "first story" author #615, Billie Lee Powers, wrote us: "What can I say? I have never been my favorite subject. I grew up in East Prairie, Missouri (population about 3,000 then and now). In fourth grade I wrote and starred in my first production, "Tea Time"—a gripping drama featuring peanut butter and jelly with tea. From there, I wrote constantly, almost obsessively, with strong encouragement from teachers to go on to journalism school.

"Shortly after high school, I met and married the love of my life and—you guessed it—no journalism school. But certainly no regrets. My husband and I moved to Cairo, Illinois, where we lived for nineteen years. Then back to East Prairie for another eight years. Two years ago, my husband and I moved to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where I managed the fashion department in a department store for a year. Retail has been my main occupation through adulthood, though I have also worked as a bookkeeper, telephone operator, and once tested for flaws in a duffel-bag factory.

"Be certain that through all of this, I was constantly writing, but always tending to tuck my material away in closets and drawers. Still do—I've instructed my family to give no credence to any written word they may find in the house after I have passed on.

"Come October, my husband and I will have lived here in rural Lucedale for two years, and I am finally determined to Show and Tell my serious intent to write."—Mrs. Powers is already making good on her promise. Since we bought this fine "fun" first from her, she has submitted another story we also like very much. It will Show and Tell in the next issue of EQMM . . .

"Q"

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THE FACTRIX

by BILLIE LEE POWERS

Everybody's buddy, good old Jess. Friendliest bank teller in town. Took after her daddy like that, they reckoned. Salt of the earth, that gal's daddy—man needed a buck, hell, look him up. Kind of made up for that straight-laced mama of hers. Shame, though, how Jessica wound up widowed so young. What was Jess now—'bout twenty-five?

Yeah—twenty-five. Pleasingly plump and then some, Jessica Weldon lay alone on her king-size bed. Her huge brown eyes unblinking, staring like a heifer through a new gate, the friendliest bank teller in town was now moonlighting as would-be murderess. Jessica was plotting the demise of her best friend's husband.

Wishy-washy, her mama called her. Like her daddy, never looking out for number one. Surprise, Mama! Your baby's on the right track now. Jessica could see no path around him—Mac Langsley must go. She had finally hit upon the perfect vehicle for his departure. She'd best get the lead out now and start mapping. Mac's journey must be planned in minute detail.

On an almost identical bed in the house next door, Maida Langsley did not lie alone. Though by day a teller in the same bank with Jessica, her moonlighting with Mac included no plans for his departure. How she loved him! Her friend, her lover, her confidant. Now, passion spent, they would start the nightly exchange of their day's happenings. It was a good time, a private time, and they could not rest until they had spent it together.

"Okay," Maida said, "I'll go first tonight. You know, if we keep doing this, I'll have to start making stuff up. There's just so much a teller can tell. And anyway, it's so dull and routine compared to your law cases. One of these nights I'm going to pretend the bank was robbed just to even things up."

"Not fair," Mac said. "I'm interested in anything you do. Talk to me, woman."

Maida shrugged. "Oh, well—shades of humdrum. Let's see—Mrs.

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Camden cleared out her savings again. Demanded four-hundred ones. She said it would make it seem like so much more. Bless her heart, she takes that money home to visit—you'd think it was her grandchildren or something. She'll bring it back next week." Maida's big brown eyes misted a bit as she said, "Mac, don't let's ever grow old and lonely."

Mac's eyes traveled slowly and appreciatively down the lovely, perfectly proportioned length of her. "*You?* Maida, you'll never grow old. And if you do, it will be very gracefully—and never, *ever* lonely, I promise. Now, let me tell you about my new client. I'm representing a factrix—"

"A *who*-trix? What in the world is that?"

"A *fac*-trix—it's the feminine term for a factor. A factor is like an agent or a representative. Say a firm needs to collect its accounts receivable. A factor or factrix would loan the firm the amount of those bills. When the firm collects the bills, the factor or factrix would receive a commission on the bills collected plus interest on the loan. So, like I said, I'm representing a factrix—a lady who's doing business for someone else."

"A lady who does business for someone else," Maida mused. "So why does this factrix need you? Wait! First, my dear, sweet, married counselor, you must describe your client. Pretty? Provocative? Remember—we're into truth."

"I've always liked the word 'gorgeous,' " Mac said. "And, yes, I'd say she's a little provocative. She's also forty-two years old. So draw in your fangs, love. She needs me because a firm she did business for won't pay her commission."

"Sounds like a merry-go-round to me." Raising herself on one elbow, Maida traced a finger down Mac's left cheek. Her expression turned serious as she looked directly into his blue-green eyes. "Now," she said, "we have to talk about Jess."

"Oh, not that again, Maida! Baby, there's just nothing more we can do about Jess right now. It's going to take time. Steve's only been dead for four months. Could you—now answer me honestly, Maida—could you adjust to losing me in four months?"

"You can't compare us to Jess and Steve, Mac. There was never any real love in that marriage and you know it. I've always believed that Jess got married only because I did. She didn't shed one tear when they came to tell her about the car wreck. Well, I guess she might have cried alone at home. I *do* feel sorry for her. But honest to God, Mac, I'm convinced the only thing she's really sad about is

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that her life is no longer exactly like mine. You know she forced Steve into buying that house next door. And then she furnished it almost exactly like ours. But she's *smothering* me! She's extra baggage now, she says. Everybody's changed toward her, she says."

Mac pulled Maida closer beside him and stroked her long hair. "It'll work out, baby. You'll see. I promise you it will be okay. Good old Jess, she just has to get her bearings. She's really a strong person underneath. As for her copying you, what woman wouldn't? Don't you feel complimented by that? Let's sleep on it, babe—okay? One of us does have to go to work in the morning."

"I forgot! Tomorrow *is* my day off!" Maida perked up considerably. But not quite ready to let it drop, she added, "At least I'm glad Jess and I are off on different days."

"Come on—you know you'd be lost without Jess. Give me a kiss and go to sleep. I'll try not to wake you in the morning. If you decide to come downtown for lunch, just call the office. I'll leave word where I'll be and you can join me. It won't matter if I'm with a client—it always boosts my ego to show you off."

"Oh?" Maida turned coy. "Then you wouldn't mind if I should happen to catch you with your *fac*trix?" She lay back on the pillow. "Why does that word fascinate me so?"

The following morning Jessica Weldon called Mac Langsley's law office. To the secretary's inevitable, "Who's calling, please?" Jessica responded, "Tell Mr. Langsley it's Jess Weldon."

"Jess?" Mac spoke into the receiver. "What's up? You okay?" He could not recall her ever calling his office before.

"Mac, I need to talk to you," Jessica said. "Could you possibly meet me for lunch? It's very important."

"Well—sure, Jess." Mac's brow creased in a puzzled frown. "Could you give me a clue what it's about?"

"At lunch, Mac," Jessica promised. "I take my break at twelve. Would it be okay with you if I call our order ahead to the restaurant next door here—the place with the good chicken-fried steak? My treat."

"Fine, Jess, sounds good. I'll see you at twelve then." Mac hung up the phone, hoping Maida wouldn't decide to join him for lunch after all. She seemed fed up with Jess already.

Jessica had completed step one. Picking up the phone again, she dialed Abner's and placed the order for what she intended to be his last meal. She planned to watch Mac choke to death on the steak

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she ordered. She would watch his every move and act on the split-second. She would startle him into an involuntary gasp that would start the strangulation process.

The fork was the thing to watch. She must keep her eyes constantly on his fork without appearing to do so. She would deliver her startling sentence just as his fork reached his mouth. "Mac," she would say, "Maida is having an affair."

She would be glad when it was over. That the odds for the success of her bizarre plot were absurdly remote did not penetrate her single-minded admiration for her own brilliance. Of *course* Mac would choke. And who could call it foul play? There would be the innocent morsel of beef administered by the victim's own hand. And the setting was equally ingenious. On familiar terms with lunchtime Abner's, she feared no interference from that crowd. They came to eat, drink, and be oblivious for each tick of freedom from bondage. Jessica was almost sorry no one would ever know how very clever she was.

She thought of how it would be when it was over. Maida would know exactly how to be a widow. Maida would pave the way into happy, carefree widowhood. Life would be good again.

Already seated at a table when Mac entered the restaurant, Jessica watched him weave his way through the tables toward her. Lord, he was handsome. And Maida did love him so. Should she spare him? Just leave town? Maybe she *could* make it on her own. No! She would not waver now.

Reaching the table, Mac smiled at her. "Hi, Jess." He pulled out a chair and sat down opposite her. "Are we here for business or pleasure? Or both? You know I'm always glad to see you, Jess."

"Why, thank you, Mac, that's sweet," Jessica said. "We're ready for our steaks now," she told the waitress when she caught her eye. Turning back to Mac, she smiled. "You know, my mama always told me no man can deal with a woman's problems on an empty stomach. Would you like something from the salad bar?"

The waitress placed the platters of steak and baked potatoes before them. "Looks good enough to eat," Mac said, spreading his napkin onto his lap. He picked up his knife and fork and began to cut his steak. Looking up at Jessica, he said, "Eat, Jess, eat. *My* mama done told *me* that no woman can properly state her case on an empty stomach."

Eat?

Now?

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How could she have forgotten Mac's impeccable manners? He may actually never take a bite until she did.

Watching his fork from under lowered lids, she managed to worry a piece of steak loose with the side of her fork and place it in her mouth. Had he noticed how her hand trembled? Oh, dear God, was she going to throw up? She dared not chew and swallow the horrid hunk of meat. She dabbed at her mouth with her napkin, thinking to remove it. But Mac was looking directly at her. Why didn't the man put the damned steak in his mouth? Were they suspended in time? He had been holding his fork a bare inch above his platter forever.

Then, finally, he moved it to his mouth. Sick with anticipation, she stared at the fork. *Now!*

"Mac," she said, "Maida is—"

Startlingly, Mac broke in: "Maida's here!"

Involuntarily, Jessica gasped. The quick, sharp intake of breath sent the unchewed meat into her throat. She saw Mac place his fork back onto his platter and stand up, heard him say, "I'll go get her," and saw him walk away. She could not scream. There was no breath for it. She tried desperately to gain the attention of Abner's noontime crowd, but they paid no heed to the plump lady in the chair under the black-skillet clock on Abner's wall that showed nine minutes beyond straight-up.

Nine P.M. No lights at the Langsleys, save the dim nightlight in the hall. Already in bed, Mac and Maida were not eager to rehash the awesomely monstrous day's happening. It lay between them, a ghostly presence of Jess, eerily waiting to eavesdrop on her own eulogy.

Mac wasn't sure he could speak just now, even if he tried. Damn! Jess had looked so pitiful, sitting dead in the chair like that. What a flukish way to go! He should be comforting Maida, poor baby. She and Jess had been friends since kindergarten. What must she be feeling? Most likely the full force hadn't hit her yet.

He jumped at the feather-light touch of Maida's hand on his shoulder.

"Mac," she said softly, "what do you suppose Jess wanted to talk with you about?"

"I really don't know, baby. Oh, God, Maida—if only I hadn't walked away." His voice broke.

Maida reached over and cradled his head in the curve of her arm.

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"Don't ever let me hear you say that again. You had nothing to do with Jess's death—*nothing*."

"Well," Mac managed, "I guess whatever she wanted to talk with me about doesn't really matter now."

No, it didn't matter now. High on cloud nine, Maida floated free. No more nights of lying beside Mac, feigning sleep, plotting how to eliminate the extra baggage from her life. No more Jess. She had turned out to be such a good factrix. She had taken excellent care of business for another—and without any commission, interest, or fee. Thank you, Jess, Maida thought—and, still cradling Mac's head, she cuddled against him for a long, dreamless sleep on the king-size bed.

The empty king-sizer next door? It was Maida's fondest dream come true.

"Q"

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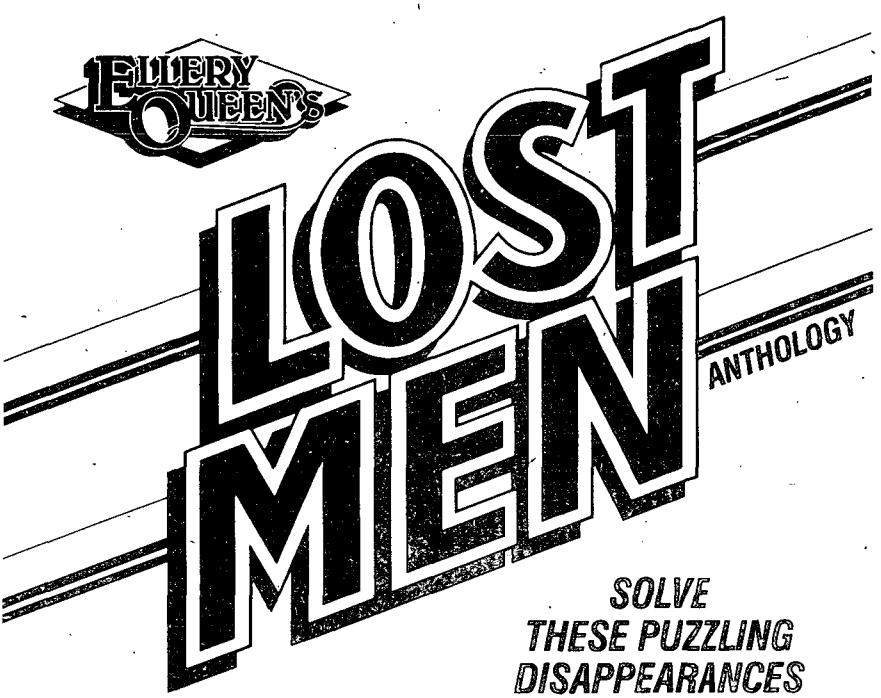

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a *NEW* Ben Snow story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

This is the ninth story in Edward D. Hoch's series about Indian fighter and hired gun Ben Snow. The first seven appeared in the mid-Sixties in the recently revived Saint Magazine *and the eighth in this year's May issue of EQMM.*

Ben had never been as far east as North Carolina before, and he quickly noted that back here men didn't wear gunbelts on the street in 1903. He left his in his suitcase while he dickered for the horse and buggy. "Kitty Hawk," he said to the man at the stable. "How far is it. . . ?"

BROTHERS ON THE BEACH

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The temperature was in the mid-forties on the December day when Ben Snow stepped off the train at Elizabeth City and went about the business of renting a horse and buggy for the remainder of his journey to the shores of the Atlantic.

He often felt there was something contrary about his gradual journey east at a time when the nation had just about completed its western expansion. There were forty-five states now, stretching from coast to coast, and already there was talk that the territories of Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona would soon be admitted to the Union. He'd fought Indians in the West in his younger days, and even journeyed to Mexico on occasion, but now it was the East that drew him. Cities like Buffalo and Savannah and New Orleans.

Rivers like the Mississippi and the Delaware had only been names on a rarely studied map when he was young. Now that he was past forty and the nation had entered the Twentieth Century, things

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were different. The West didn't need Indian fighters any more, or hired guns whose draw was as fast as Billy the Kid's.

Ben Snow had never been a man to settle down as a ranch hand. He'd considered working for Pinkerton's, putting his crime-solving abilities to some use, but the detective agency's deep involvement in strike-breaking wasn't to his liking. So he drifted, taking jobs where he found them, helping out old friends when he could.

He'd never been as far east as North Carolina before, and he quickly noted that back here men didn't wear gunbelts on the street in 1903. He left his in his suitcase while he dickered for the horse and buggy. "Kitty Hawk," he said to the man at the stable. "How far is it?"

"About thirty-five miles," the man answered. "You take the road east to Barco and then turn south along the coast. It's on a narrow cape that runs all the way down to Hatteras and beyond, but you can get a ferry to take you across. Why'd anyone want to go to Kitty Hawk in December, though? There's nothing there but a beach, and it's too damn cold for swimming. The wind beats across there like a gale most of the time."

"I have to see a man," Ben answered. "How much for the horse and buggy?"

They dickered a bit before Ben finally drove off in the buggy. He'd noticed a few automobiles—as people were starting to call them—on the streets of the city, but he hadn't felt brave enough to try one. Besides, he didn't know what sort of roads awaited him along the coastal sand spit.

It was shortly after he'd passed through Barco and headed south along the coast, getting his first view of the turbulent Atlantic, when a lone horseman overtook him. The man was young and handsome, with curly blond hair, and he sat well in the saddle. "Would you be Ben Snow?" he asked, drawing abreast of the buggy.

"That's me."

He leaned over to offer his hand. "Roderick Claymore. My brother Rudolph hired you, but he had to go to the state capital on business and he asked that I meet you."

They pulled up and Ben swung down from the buggy. "I'm a lot more comfortable on a horse," he admitted, "but with my suitcase, the buggy seemed best."

Claymore took out a cigar and offered Ben one. "How much did my brother tell you?"

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"Only that he was hiring me to guard a section of beach at Kitty Hawk for the next week or so. He wanted someone from far away, and that's what he got. He hired me last week in St. Louis."

Roderick Claymore nodded, puffing on the thin cigar. "About three years ago, a pair of brothers from Dayton, the Wrights, started coming here and flying gliders off the dunes at Kitty Hawk. Seems they wrote the Weather Bureau and were told this was the best testing area for gliders because the winds off the ocean blow at a fairly constant twenty miles an hour or better."

"Does this glider-testing bother you?"

"It didn't at first. No one paid much attention to them. But now things are changing. We own some land nearby and it's important that we don't have a lot of trespassers. They're planning something for Monday that could bring the whole country to our door."

"What would that be?"

"Last summer they started shipping in parts for a powered craft they've been constructing there on the beach. They built their own lightweight gasoline engine—four cylinders, watercooled."

"I don't know much about engines," Ben admitted.

"It's to drive two eight-foot wooden propellers mounted to the rear of the wings. This craft won't be a glider. It'll take off and fly by itself, with one of the Wrights aboard. That's why we need you."

Ben Snow smiled slightly. "To shoot it down?"

"Hardly."

"Back in '96, out West, there was a fellow billed himself as The Flying Man. He strapped wings to his arms and tried to glide off hilltops. Somebody killed him one day during an exhibition, and I helped solve the murder. I'm just telling you so you'll know which side of the fence I'm on. I've killed plenty of men in my day, but never one who didn't deserve it. I'm not a hired gun, despite what you and your brother might have heard."

"Look here, Snow, we don't want any hired guns. But if those crazy Wrights bring a thousand people to that beach to see their flight on Monday, we want them kept off our property any way that's necessary."

"All right," Ben agreed. "Where am I staying?"

"There's a lady teacher has a house in Kill Devil Hills, just a few miles from Kitty Hawk. We rented a room there for you."

"That'll be just fine."

It seemed ironic to Ben that he'd had to travel east to North

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Carolina to find the legendary pretty schoolmarm who was supposed to inhabit every western town. Elizabeth Boyers was a dark-haired beauty, probably past thirty but with a fine girlish figure and a smile that could melt the coldest heart. She lived alone in the house across the street from the one-room school building where she taught.

"There aren't many children here," she admitted. "They're mostly from older families who've lived here all their lives. But someone has to teach them. If I left, they'd have to take the ferry to the mainland."

It was Sunday and they were strolling on the beach together, looking over the site where the Wrights would attempt their flight the following day.

"Do you think they'll make it?" he asked.

"Frankly, no. Not after what happened to Langley last Wednesday."

"Who's Langley?"

She laughed. "You don't keep up with the newspapers, Mr. Snow. Samuel Langley, the inventor, had a $50,000 grant from the War Department to develop a flying machine. He spent five years on it, and last Wednesday he tried to launch it from the roof of a houseboat in the Potomac River with boatloads of Washington reporters and government officials looking on. But a wing tip caught on its catapult and the craft broke apart in the air. Langley is secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. If he can't build a proper flying machine, these brothers from a bicycle shop in Dayton can hardly be expected to do it."

"Will there be reporters here tomorrow?"

"Not if the Wrights can help it. They're trying to keep it secret until the flight is successful. Then they'll send a telegram to their father asking that the press be notified."

"Then why is Claymore so worried?"

She hesitated before answering. "Who hired you—Roderick or Rudolph?"

"Rudolph. He's the older one, isn't he? He came to me in St. Louis and offered to pay my expenses and a week's salary if I'd come here to guard his beach. It seemed to me he could have hired someone from here in town for half the money."

"They do own some land down the beach. I've seen them digging there. I kidded them about looking for pirate treasure. These islands

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along the Atlantic coast have always had pirate legends connected with them."

"Why did you ask which one hired me?"

"Oh," she answered casually, "I've had a little trouble with the younger one, Roderick—the one who brought you here yesterday. I went out with him a few times last year and he asked me to marry him. I said no, but he won't accept that. Now I'm engaged to someone else and he's bothering me. I wouldn't have taken their money for the room if I didn't need it."

"What do they do for a living when they're not digging for buried treasure?"

"They have an ice business. They deliver blocks of ice to homes and businesses in all the towns around here."

"Never had anything like that out where I come from."

She smiled at him. "This is civilization. This is the Twentieth Century."

When they returned to the house after inspecting—at a distance—the Wright brothers' flying machine, Ben found Rudolph Claymore waiting for him. Rudolph was larger and tougher than his younger brother, and while Roderick sat well on a horse Ben couldn't imagine this man ever riding one. In St. Louis, where he'd hired Ben, Rudolph had seemed like a successful businessman. Here, in his home territory, there was something vaguely sinister about him.

"You saw that flying contraption of theirs?" he asked Ben.

Ben nodded. "Looks backwards to me. The tail seems to be in the front. But flying isn't my line."

"If we're in luck, they'll crash tomorrow like that fellow Langley did. But if it's successful and people start pouring in here, I'll need you to guard our beach property for the next week or so."

"Couldn't you have hired someone from one of the towns around here for that purpose?" Elizabeth said. "Why bring Mr. Snow all the way from St. Louis?"

"I want someone who'll be here today and gone tomorrow, not one of the town boys who'll have a few drinks at the bar and get to talking too much. Mr. Snow's got a good reputation out West. When I asked around for someone to hire, he was the one everyone mentioned."

Claymore took Ben aside and gave him a down payment on his fee, along with the travel expenses. "You brought your gun, didn't you?"

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"I have it," Ben assured him.

"Wear it tomorrow, but keep it under your coat."

When he'd gone, Ben asked Elizabeth, "What do you think is so valuable about that strip of sand?"

"Besides the pirate treasure?" she answered with a smile. "I have no idea."

Ben slept restlessly that night, wondering what the morning would bring. What it brought was more of the same as far as the weather was concerned. A cool breeze was blowing off the ocean and he found he needed the wool jacket he'd brought with him from the Midwest. He buckled his gunbelt under it, making certain all chambers of the Colt six-shooter were loaded. He wondered vaguely if there were laws back East against carrying concealed weapons. Maybe that's why the Claymore brothers had wanted someone from far away.

"Are you up, Mr. Snow?" Elizabeth called to him through the bedroom door.

"Sure am. I'll be right down."

"Breakfast is ready. My fiancé, Mark Freen, is joining us."

Freen was an agreeable chap with brown hair and a ready smile. Like Elizabeth, he was a teacher, though his school was on the mainland. "I'm playing hooky today," he explained. "We both are. This might be an historic occasion—right here at Kitty Hawk."

Ben was surprised to see that a fair crowd of local residents had gathered along the beach. "Those are the Wright brothers," Elizabeth said, pointing out two men in caps and jackets. They seemed to be in their thirties. "Orville and Wilbur."

"Do you know them personally?"

"I've spoken with them. They've been here since September assembling the *Flyer*. That's the name of it. And last year they made over a thousand controlled glider flights here. Everyone knows them by now."

They were interrupted by the arrival of an older man with thick glasses and a beard. "Oh, Professor—I want you to meet Ben Snow!" Elizabeth Boyers performed the introductions as if they were both her oldest friends. "Ben, this is Professor Minder from the university at Raleigh."

Ben shook hands and asked, "Did you come all this distance for today's flight?"

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"Not exactly," the professor replied. "I'm doing research just south of here, on Roanoke Island. You may remember it was the site of Sir Walter Raleigh's lost colony."

Ben nodded and turned up his collar against the chill wind. "I hope they get started soon. It's cold out here."

The *Flyer* had been pulled from its storage shed by the Wrights and five assistants. Ben heard someone in the crowd comment that it weighed over six hundred pounds. They positioned it on a level stretch of sand at the base of a hundred-foot-high dune named Kill Devil Hill. Then the brothers flipped a coin and Wilbur won the toss. After the *Flyer* had been placed aboard a low trolley on the single sixty-foot rail of a greased launching track, he climbed aboard and lay face down in a cradlelike harness across the lower wing, working the wing and rudder controls with his body in a final check before takeoff.

The crowd tensed and Ben glanced around for some sign of the Claymores. There were figures farther down the beach, but he couldn't tell who they were. His attention returned to the *Flyer* as the gasoline engine sputtered into life. The twin propellers started to turn and the machine glided down its greased track. There was the beginning of a roar from the crowd and cameras poised to capture the moment of flight.

Then, unaccountably, the engine stalled at takeoff. The *Flyer* dropped to the sand with a soft thud.

As the crowd groaned, Orville rushed forward to pull his brother from the craft. "It's over," Elizabeth said sadly. "It'll never fly."

"Another Langley," Mark Freen said, summing it all up.

Wilbur stood up, free of the craft, and the brothers began inspecting the damage. Ben turned and noticed Professor Minder sitting on the sand. "Excitement too much for you?" he asked in fun, bending down to offer his hand.

That was when he saw the knife protruding from Minder's back and realized the man he'd just met had been murdered.

The investigation of a murder case was far different in the East than anything Ben had known out West. There, a sheriff bothered little with clues or suspects. There he looked for eyewitnesses or the person with the likeliest motive, and if justice came at all it was usually swift and deadly. On that windswept beach in North Carolina, while the Wrights worked to repair their damaged aircraft, justice was slow and plodding. Justice was a pair of State Police

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officers with notebooks, taking down names and addresses and setting up a camera to take a photograph of the murder scene.

There was general agreement among all witnesses that the brothers Wright couldn't have had a hand in the killing, since all eyes were on them during the entire period. But that did little to narrow the field of suspects. Any one of the dozens of spectators could have been the guilty party, and in the eyes of the State Police that included Ben Snow.

"Private citizens don't wear gunbelts in North Carolina," one of them told him pointedly. "This isn't the wild West."

"Tell that to the dead man," Ben replied.

The officer's name was Rellens, and he eyed Ben as if he'd like to lock him away in a cell. "What are you doing here, anyway?"

"I was hired by the Claymore brothers to guard their strip of beach land. They feared some of the crowd might wander down that way."

"So you're guarding it from up here?"

"I can see it from here. I can see no one's on it."

"Were the Claymores here today?"

"I didn't see them."

"Pretty strange if they missed something like this," Rellens said.

Ben had been thinking the same thing as his eyes traveled over the spectators. Some had started to drift away, but the majority had stayed after giving their names, drawn by the twin spectacles of the murder investigation and the Wrights' efforts to repair their flying machine.

Then he saw Rudolph Claymore striding over the dunes in their direction. He left Rellens and went to meet his employer. "What happened here?" Rudolph demanded. "I just got word there's been a killing—"

"That's right," Ben said. "A professor named Minder."

"Minder! I know the man! He's been working on an island nearby!"

"Someone stabbed him."

"Is my brother here?"

"I haven't seen him all morning."

"He didn't come to work today and I assumed he was down here. I had to cover the entire ice route myself." Rudolph Claymore glanced along the windswept beach. "What about our property?"

"No one's gone near it," Ben assured him.

"Not Minder, before he was killed?"

"Not unless it was early this morning before I got here. You didn't say anything about guarding it day and night."

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"No, no. I just thought you might have noticed him wandering down that way."

"I think it's about time you tell me what this is all about," Ben said. "I might be able to help the investigation if I knew all the facts."

"All right," Claymore agreed. "Come to my house tonight. I'll have my brother there, too, if I can find him. Here's the address. It's in the village of Kitty Hawk."

Elizabeth and Freen had been over by the damaged aircraft and were hurrying back. "Orville says the repairs will take a few days, but they hope to try again on Thursday," she said. "Will you be staying that long, Mr. Snow?"

"I expect so. The Claymores hired me for the week."

"I saw that policeman, Rellens, talking to you. Did he ask for your help?"

"Not exactly."

"Does he have any suspects?"

"Right now I may be his prime suspect. He noticed I was wearing a gunbelt."

"That's absurd! We were all standing together."

"But Professor Minder was right behind us. With all eyes on the Wrights and their machine, I suppose I could have reached around and stabbed him. Someone did."

"But why? He was a sweet old man. Why would anyone kill him?"

"What do you know about him? What was he doing here?"

"Mark knows more about him than I do. He went over to see him on Roanoke Island a few weeks ago."

"He was studying evidence of the so-called Lost Colony," Freen explained. "You know, the colony founded by Sir Walter Raleigh that vanished from that island between 1587 and 1590."

Ben's knowledge of early colonial history was vague at best, but he nodded and urged Freen to continue.

"Well, a colony of some eighty-five men and women remained on the island in 1587 while a ship returned to England for supplies. The war between England and Spain prevented the supplies from reaching Roanoke until 1590, and by that time all that could be found was a deserted, ransacked fortress. None of the settlers was ever found. The name *Croatoan* was carved into a post—apparently the name of an island to the south. They may have gone there, or

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they may have been killed by Indians. It's one of the mysteries of history."

"And Professor Minder thought he'd found new evidence of what happened," Elizabeth Boyers interjected. "He was over here a few times pursuing his studies."

"Interesting," Ben admitted. "But why should anyone kill him? Why would something that happened over three hundred years ago cost a man his life?"

They returned to the house without an answer. Later that afternoon, while Elizabeth and Freen were alone, Ben walked back up the beach alone. From a distance he watched the Wright brothers and their helpers working on the flying machine. He saw that Rellens was still there, too, pacing back and forth as he examined the trampled sand.

That evening Ben Snow rode over to the address Claymore had given him. It was one of a handful of houses in the tiny village of Kitty Hawk, and Rudolph came out on the porch to greet him as he parked his buggy. "Come in, Snow. My brother's already here."

Ben entered and took a chair in the sparsely furnished parlor. A woman's touch was obviously lacking and it occurred to him for the first time that the elder Claymore was probably not married. He shook hands with Roderick and said, "I didn't see you this morning."

"I had business," Roderick answered. "I hear the flying machine never got off the ground."

"They're repairing it. They plan to try again on Thursday."

Rudolph came in and sat down. "Some of the folks around here are helping them. We got more important things on our minds."

"Tell me about it," Ben suggested. "Tell me why that property of yours is so valuable. Is there really pirate treasure buried there?"

The older brother smiled slightly. "Next best thing, according to Professor Minder. You know about the Lost Colony and that business on Roanoke Island?"

"A little."

"Well, historians have always speculated that the colonists went south to another island, if they weren't killed by Indians. Minder went there and nosed around. He decided they came north instead, right here to the beach at Kitty Hawk. Look at this here map. You can see that the abandoned Fort Raleigh was at the very northern tip of Roanoke, not ten miles across the water from where we are now."

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"Minder told you this?"

"Damned right!" Roderick said. "He did a little digging by our property there and came up with evidence of settlement!"

Rudolph showed Ben a bowl with a piece missing from it. "See this? It's not Indian. It's the sort the colonists brought with them from England."

"But you were keeping this a secret?" Ben asked.

"Had to! Other people own some of that beach land, especially near the village here. We started buying it up. An old settlement like that could mean a spot people would pay to see. It could make us rich."

"Who knew about this?" Ben asked.

"Only the two of us and Minder. That's why I went so far away to hire a guard. I didn't want any of the locals getting wind of what we were trying to hide."

"How much land have you bought?"

"Around twenty thousand dollars' worth so far. Minder agreed to act as a middleman so the people wouldn't know we were the buyers."

"And that's what you've been digging for?" Ben asked

Rudolph nodded. "We uncovered some more things on our own, too—a few trinkets and a sword."

Roderick scratched at his cheek. "We'd better check on those land deeds in the morning. With Minder dead, we could be out twenty grand."

"I've already thought of that," his brother answered sourly.

Ben left them going over their records, trying to establish the extent of their possible losses.

On Tuesday afternoon, the State Police officer, Rellens, showed up at the Boyers house to see Ben. He sat down heavily and flipped open his notebook. "This case has taken a couple of surprising turns," he said. "I need to interview witnesses again, especially those who were standing closest to the victim."

"Miss Boyers is teaching today," Ben told him.

"You'll do for a beginning. It seems one of the men in that crowd of spectators gave a false name and address. Dick Roer, of Kill Devil Hills. No such person."

"You think you let the murderer walk away?"

"Looks like it," he said glumly. "I seem to remember him vaguely. Had a Teddy Roosevelt mustache and was wearing a wool cap. Of

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course, the mustache could have been a fake. Do you remember anyone looking like that near you?"

"No," Ben answered honestly. "But I wasn't concentrating on the crowd."

"All right." Rellens closed his notebook, preparing to leave.

"You said the case had taken a couple of surprising turns. What else?"

"The dead man—Minder. It turns out he was a fake, too. There's no Professor Minder connected with any of the universities in Raleigh."

"Interesting," Ben admitted. "Two men with false identities on the beach yesterday—one a murderer and one a victim."

"It looks that way." Rellens nodded.

"But why was Minder using a false name? Who was he?"

"We'll find out," Rellens promised. "You'll be here for the next few days, Mr. Snow?"

"At least till after Thursday's flight."

"That's good," Rellens said and was gone.

On Wednesday Ben Snow sought out Rudolph Claymore on his ice route. He found him lugging fifty-pound blocks into a little café in Kill Devil Hills. "I wanted to ask you about your brother," he said.

"He's back at the ice house. You can find him there."

"He was in love with Elizabeth Boyers, wasn't he?"

"Still is, far as I know. But she's sappy over that teacher, Mark Freen. It hit my brother hard."

"Ever hear of someone named Dick Roer around here?"

"Can't say that I have."

"Rellens thinks that was the name the killer used on Monday."

"Never heard of him." Claymore climbed into the back of his wagon and used an ice pick to loosen another fifty-pound block.

"That looks like hard work."

Rudolph shrugged. "It's a living." He flipped the pick into the next block in line. "It pays the bills till something big like that Lost Colony comes along."

"What if the Lost Colony never happens? What if Professor Minder was a fraud?"

Rudolph Claymore blinked and stared at Ben. "What are you saying?"

"Have you and your brother checked on that property yet?"

"He's doing it today."

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"I wish you luck," Ben said and started to walk away.

"Wait a minute!" Claymore said, hurrying after him. "What are you trying to tell me?"

"That Minder was a fraud. That wasn't his real name, and chances are those trinkets in the sand were put there by him so you'd find them. Out West we call it salting a mine—putting a few gold nuggets near the surface for the suckers to find."

"But the property—"

"If he was trying to swindle someone, it must have been you. He probably took your twenty thousand and faked some papers, without ever buying the land."

"That—"

Ben left him standing by his ice wagon, still swearing.

The younger Claymore was a bit more difficult to track down. He was gone from the ice house by the time Ben reached it and he had to stop at a couple of nearby bars before he spotted Roderick's horse tethered outside the village stable. He found the young man inside, seeing to the repair of one of his saddle stirrups.

"I had a talk with your brother this morning," Ben told him. "Could I have a few words with you outside?"

Roderick shrugged. "I suppose so. You going to be on guard at the beach again tomorrow?"

"I'll be there. But when you hear what I have to say, you may decide you don't need me." Ben told him quickly what he'd told his brother, about Professor Minder's false identity and the probable swindle. Roderick's reaction wasn't quite as violent as his brother's, but it was obvious he was upset.

"I always wondered about that guy. He didn't seem right for a professor."

"Have you checked on the deeds yet?"

"I was on my way there now."

"There's something else," Ben said.

"What's that?"

"The police think Minder's killer is a man named Dick Roer."

The color drained from Roderick's face.

"That's you, isn't it? Dick Roer is a simple anagram for Roderick."

"I don't know what you mean."

"You were on the beach Monday morning, wearing a wool cap and a false mustache. You killed Professor Minder."

"I didn't! That's not true!"

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"Why else would you be there in disguise?"

"That's none of your business. We hired you to guard our property, not to snoop around."

"If you don't answer me, you'll have to answer to the police."

He glowered and started to walk away, then thought better of it. "All right—if you must know. I wanted to see Elizabeth!"

"See her?"

"With him. With that Freen fellow. I wanted to hear what they were talking about."

"You disguised yourself to spy on Elizabeth Boyers?"

"Yes." His voice had dropped and he wouldn't meet Ben's eyes. "I love her."

"You can't accept the fact that she might find pleasure with another man?"

"I just wanted to hear what they talked about, to see for myself if she really cared for him. That's all. I barely realized Minder was there."

"All right," Ben said, not knowing whether he believed him nor not. "Will you be there in the morning?"

"Yes," Roderick answered.

"In disguise?"

"There's no point in it now, is there?"

Thursday morning dawned clear but freezing cold. When Ben reached the beach at Kitty Hawk in the company of Mark Freen and Elizabeth, they were saying the wind off the ocean was blowing at twenty-seven miles an hour. The few spectators were bundled against the cold and some were doubting the Wright brothers would attempt the flight.

But shortly after nine A.M., Wilbur and Orville gathered up their five assistants and once more hauled the machine from its shed. It was lifted onto the trolley at the base of Kill Devil Hill.

In addition to Elizabeth and Freen, who'd taken off another day from their teaching, both Claymore brothers were in attendance. And Ben saw Rellens pacing nearby. The cast was assembled.

Rudolph came up to stand next to Ben. "What did you say to my brother yesterday? Whatever is was, he's been pretty upset by it. He didn't even want to come out here today."

"I notice he's staying clear of Elizabeth Boyers."

"Well, they used to go together. I suppose he's jealous of her friend."

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It seemed to take the Wrights forever to make their adjustments to the *Flyer* and the cold wind drove a few of the less hardy souls away. Orville was busy setting up the tripod for his camera, then aiming it at the end of the launching track. If the plane became airborne, he wanted a picture for the ages.

Finally, at 10:30, they were ready.

It was young Orville's turn to be at the controls this time and he glanced around for someone to snap the shutter of his camera. He called to one of the townspeople who'd been helping out and asked him to take the picture if the plane became airborne. Then he climbed aboard the *Flyer* and strapped himself down. Wilbur pulled the cap down more snugly on his head and gripped the lower right wingtip of the biplane.

The engine started and the propellers began to turn. The *Flyer* moved on its track. Wilbur began trotting alongside, holding the wingtip steady.

"He didn't do that on Monday," Rudolph Claymore remarked.

And then Orville opened the throttle more, bringing the engine to full power. The time was 10:35.

"No, he didn't," Ben Snow agreed. "But how did you know if you weren't here?"

The *Flyer* lifted from its track, airborne. Wilbur released the wing as the camera shutter clicked. A cheer went up from the small group of spectators.

The machine wobbled and swooped down, its runner hitting the sand. The flight had lasted only twelve seconds, never more than ten feet off the ground, but it had covered 120 feet.

People were running forward. Rudolph Claymore started to move, but Ben restrained him. "You knew what happened on Monday because you were here. Because you came to murder the man who'd swindled you."

"You think I was this Dick Roer?"

"No, that was your brother, spying on Elizabeth."

"But everyone else in the crowd was accounted for!"

"You never joined the crowd, Rudolph. You hid behind a sand dune, and while all eyes were on the Wrights at the crucial moment, you sneaked up just close enough to *throw* that knife into Minder's back, just like you flipped that ice pick into the cake of ice yesterday. You never came closer than fifteen or twenty feet, and the sand was too trampled to show footprints. No one saw you because we were all looking in the opposite direction."

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"But I didn't know he was a swindler until you told me yesterday!" Rudolph argued.

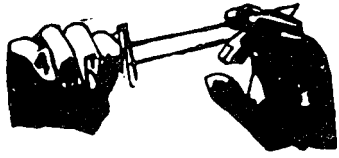
"You put on a very good act, but I think you knew. When your brother met me, he said you'd gone to the state capital on business. That's Raleigh, where Minder claimed to teach. You checked on him while you were there and discovered he was a fake. You came back here and killed him the first chance you had."

Rellens had been overhearing the conversation and now he stepped forward. "Do you have anything to say, Mr. Claymore?"

The fight had gone out of Rudolph. "Only that he deserved to die for swindling us. No jury will convict me."

Ben Snow left town the following morning. The Claymores' land didn't need protection any longer and he never heard what the jury decided. For that matter, it was a few years before he heard the Wright brothers mentioned again. They made four successful flights that December 17th at Kitty Hawk, and their father spread the news, but only two newspapers in the country carried a report the following day.

No crowds came to Kitty Hawk. The Claymores hadn't needed Ben Snow after all.



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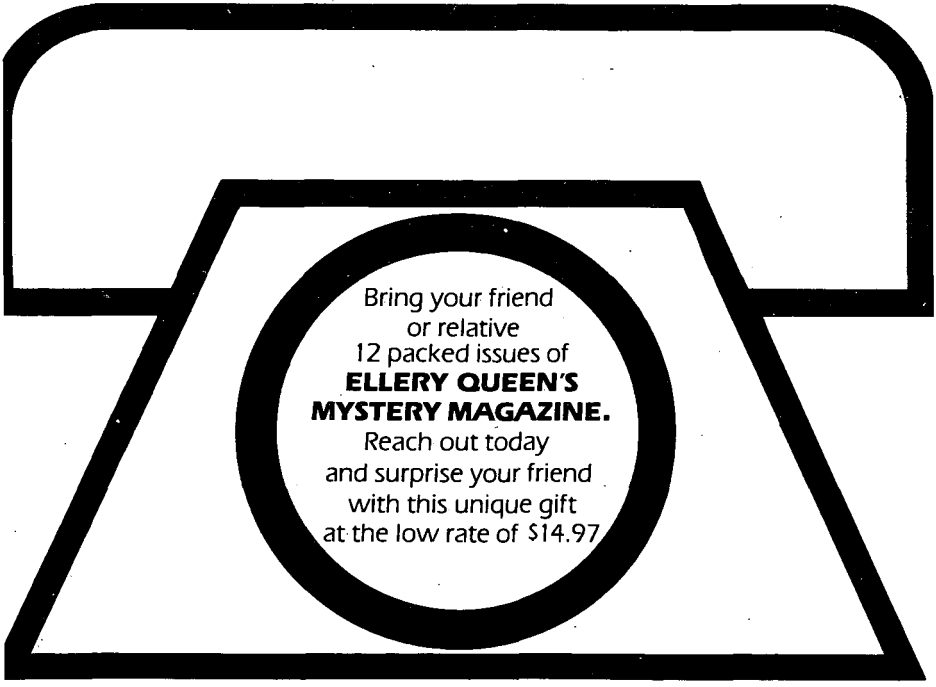

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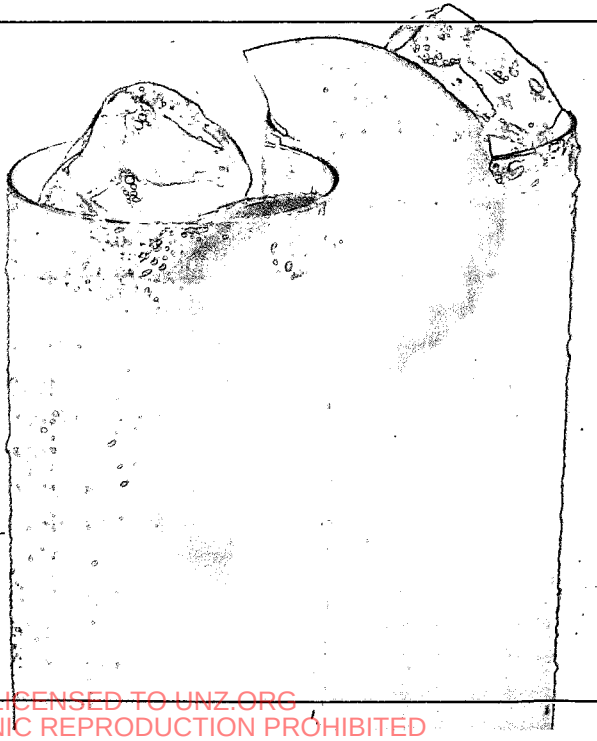

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